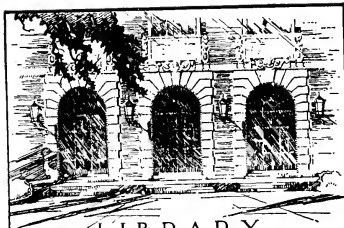


THE
CHARLEQUIN OPAL
A ROMANCE

FERGUS HUME.



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THE HARLEQUIN OPAL



THE
HARLEQUIN OPAL

A ROMANCE

BY

FERGUS HUME

Author of "The Island of Fantasy," "Aladdin in London," etc.

VOLUME II

Once a realm of Indian glory,
Famed in Aztec song and story,
Fabled by Tradition hoary
 As an earthly Paradise ;
Now a land of love romances,
Serenades, bolero dances,
Looks of scorn, adoring glances,
 Under burning tropic skies.

LONDON

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PROEM.

The stone had its birth in the nurturing earth,
Its home in the heart of the main,
From the coraline caves it was tossed by the waves
On the breast of an aureat plain ;
And the spirits who dwell in the nethermost hell
Stored fire in its bosom of white ;
The sylphs of the air made it gracious and fair
With the blue of the firmament's height.

The dull gnomes I ween, gave it glittering sheen,
Till yellow as gold it became ;
The nymphs of the sea made the opal to be
A beacon of emerald flame.

The many tints glow, they come and they go
At bidding of spirits abhorr'd,
When one ray is bright, in the bosom of white,
Its hue tells the fate of its lord.
For yellow hints wealth, and blue meaneth health,
While green forbodes passing of gloom,
But beware of the red, 'tis an omen of dread,
Portending disaster and doom.

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THE HARLEQUIN OPAL.

CHAPTER I.

AWAY TO THE NORTH

Oh, leave the south, the languid south,
Its cloudless skies, its weary calms ;
The land of heat, and glare, and drouth,
Where aloes bloom, and spring the palms.
There water is the best of alms,
To cool the ever-parched mouth ;
Oh, with the breezes bearing balms,
Fly northward from the languid south.

Oh, seek the bitter northern skies,
Where falls the snow, and blows the sleet ;
'Mid which the stormy sea-bird cries,
And circles on its pinions fleet.
On rocky shores the surges beat,
And icebergs crystalline arise,
Life thrills our veins with tropic heat,
Beneath the bitter northern skies.

ONCE more *The Bohemian* was breasting the warm waves of the Pacific, and seemed to rejoice in her

freedom like a sentient thing, as she plunged northward to Acauhtzin. The smoke poured black from her wide-mouthed funnel, the blades of her propeller, lashing the waters to foam, left behind her a long trail of white, and her sharp nose dipped and fell in the salt brine with every pulsation of the pistons. Beneath the folds of the Union Jack, streaming in the wind, were gathered the Englishmen and the Cholacacans, all light-hearted and hopeful, despite the undoubted peril of their mission. It was no light task to beard Xuarez in his stronghold, to assert the authority of the Republic in the teeth of his army. The mission was a valiant one, but foolhardy, and Tim, if no one else, looked for anything but a peaceful termination to the voyage.

The distance to Acauhtzin was something over three hundred miles, and as *The Bohemian* was swirling along at the rate of seventeen knots an hour, it was hoped she would reach her destination in fifteen hours or thereabouts. Owing to one thing and another, the yacht had not left Tlatonac till close on four o'clock in the afternoon ; so, making all allowance for possible accidents and stoppages, at the rate

she was going, Philip calculated that he would fetch the northern capital about dawn. He did not wish to venture too near the port in the darkness, as the war-ships were protecting the town, and not seeing the English ensign, might open fire on his yacht, under the impression that she was an enemy. With this idea the engines were slowed down during the voyage, and *The Bohemian* was timed to enter the port some time before noon of the next day.

Owing to the number of people on board (twenty-six souls, in addition to the crew), it was somewhat difficult to provide all with accommodation. Fortunately, however, the nights were warm and rainless, so the soldiers made themselves comfortable on deck, and slept soundly enough, wrapped in their military cloaks. The sailing-master of *The Bohemian*, a tough old salt, by name Simon Benker, growled a good deal at the way in which his spotless decks were being spoiled, but Philip managed to smooth him down by representing the seriousness of the situation. Benker submitted with but ill grace. The yacht was the pride of his life, the darling of his heart, and he had no great love for

the inhabitants of Cholocaca. However, Sir Philip was master, and gave the soldiers permission to camp out on deck, so Benker was forced to acquiesce in the arrangement.

The ambassadors, in company with the three Englishmen, took up their quarters in the state-room and cabins. As there were not enough bunks, some of them had to sleep in the saloon, so the younger members of the party gave up the sleeping-berths to the elders, and did their best to make shift in a rough-and-ready fashion. As they sat up late, however, and got up early, this inconvenienced them but little, and the utmost good humour prevailed above and below during the voyage. The crew, with the exception of Benker, fraternised with the soldiers, and their masters entertained the Spanish hidalgos ; so, despite all inconveniences, things went off capitally. Even Jack plucked up his spirits now that he was on his way to rescue Dolores, and Philip's excellent brand of champagne had a wonderful effect of keeping the temperament of all up to what Tim called, "concert pitch."

Don Alonzo Cebrian was a pompous old man,

whose every second word was, "I, the Intendente." He was as proud as Lucifer, and never alluded to the rebels save by the opprobrious names of canalla, ladrons, demonios, all of which terms were echoed regularly by Captain Velez. This young gentleman, a good-looking spendthrift, with a rather scampish reputation, played the part of echo to please the Intendente, whose daughter he wished to marry for her dowry. The lady was plain, but her father was rich; so Captain Velez was quite willing to sacrifice his good looks and bachelor freedom on the altar of matrimony, provided he was well paid for doing so. Don Rafael was in the highest of spirits at the prospect of seeing Doña Carmiencita, and kept things going by the liveliness of his sallies, while Colonel Garibay smoked endless cigarettes and spoke but little.

After an excellent dinner, which was done full justice to by the hungry Spaniards, they all went on deck, and sat down to smoke and talk. First and foremost, they all paid Sir Philip handsome compliments about the beauty and speed of *The Bohemian*, and then drifted gradually into the one

subject of the hour—the war with Xuarez—the embassy to Xuarez—the certainty of punishing Xuarez.

“Begad! Philip,” whispered Tim, who was smoking a villainous black clay pipe, “it’s all Xuarez and nothing else. Is he the only man the *Opposidores* have?”

“So it appears,” replied Philip, leaning back in his chair; “the whole row seems to hinge on Xuarez. Is that not your opinion, Don Rafael?”

“What is that, *mi amigo*? I do not understand English.”

“That Xuarez is the only capable man on the side of the *Opposidores*?”

“*Ladrons!*” interrupted Don Alonzo, with stately spite. “I, the *Intendente*, think otherwise. Xuarez is clever; but, *Señores*, no one is so clever as Tejada! *Canalla!*”

“*Canalla!*” echoed Velez, removing his cigarette, “no one is so clever as Tejada!”

“Don José is being deceived by Xuarez,” said Rafael, ruffled at this allusion to his proposed father-in-law; “he is a pompous old fool, and, if he is wise,

will leave Acauhtzin with his family, and place him self under the protection of the Republic."

"He won't do that," replied Garibay, decisively ; "he is of too much service to Xuarez. The Opposidores have but little wealth, and Tejada is a rich man."

"Well, no matter, Señores. I, the Intendente, will arrest them both, and carry them in chains to the Junta."

"I am afraid that will be more difficult than you imagine, Señor," said Rafael, dryly. "Xuarez is adored by the townspeople of Acauhtzin. He has a passably good army, the friendship of the Indians, who are being urged on to war by that prophetic opal, and a capital fleet. With all these at his command, he would be a fool to yield at the mere reading of a decree. No. This war will be a long one—a difficult one—and it is doubtful if, in the end, Don Hypolito will not conquer."

Garibay frowned, and looked sternly at the young man.

"Are your sympathies with the Opposidores, Señor?"

"By no means. I see in Xuarez a possible tyrant, an unscrupulous scoundrel ; but I am not so blinded as to overlook his talents. Already he has scored heavily against us. The securing of the fleet, the gaining of Acauhtzin to his interest, and all without a blow. Believe me, Colonel, I speak truly when I say Xuarez is a foe to be dreaded."

"He will not dare to defy the decree of the Republic," said the Intendente, pompously. "When I read this," added Don Alonzo, tapping his breast-pocket, where lay the official paper, "he will yield."

"Certainly!" echoed Velez, parrot-like, "he will yield. Carambo! He dare not defy Don Alonzo!"

"Do you think Xuarez is a second Montezuma, to yield in the presence of his army, Señores," cried Rafael, vehemently. "I tell you no! Were he alone, he would resist arrest. How much more so, then, when supported by the devotion of hundreds. I am a true subject of the Republic ; I hate, dread, and scorn Don Hypolito. But I do not despise him. He will be the Napoleon of Cholocaca. Let the Republic beware!"

"Ah! bah!" said Colonel Garibay, while Don Alonzo

snorted with indignation. "X Suarez may be a clever man; but he is no general. Why, he does not even make the first move!"

"No; he bides his time. When he does move, Tlatonac will hear of it."

"You mean, he will bombard the city?"

"Yes, and no! I will explain. Excuse me one moment, Señores. I go for a map of the country."

Don Rafael ran down to the cabin; and during his absence the Intendente and Captain Velez scoffed at the idea that Suarez would be a dangerous enemy. They had a duet in a braggadocio vein.

"He will yield, Senores, when I read this decree."

"The troops of Tlatonac alone can crush him," added Velez, confidently.

"We will swallow these rebels at a mouthful. I, the Intendente, say so."

"The war will be a mere military promenade!" said his echo.

"So said the French at the outbreak of the Franco-Prussian war," interjected Philip, grimly, "but they made a mistake. What is your opinion, Colonel?"

"I agree with Don Rafael," replied Garibay, slowly "I am by no means inclined to undervalue our opponent. Xuarez is as cunning as Satan, and as ambitious. His first moves in this war have resulted to his own advantage; therefore I am not so confident of a speedy termination to this campaign as are these gentlemen. Fire-crackers, such as reading a decree will not frighten a man like Xuarez!"

"Then you think this journey useless?" asked Jack, who was of much the same opinion himself.

"Absolutely, Señors. I believe we are on the eve of a terrible struggle, and to whom will result the advantage I know not."

"If all the Junta were as faint-hearted as yourself and Don Rafael, we would yield without a blow," said the Intendente, bitterly.

"Without a blow," from Velez, in the same tone! "Carambo!"

"You are wrong, Señor," cried the Colonel, with fiery earnestness, "I am not faint-hearted. I will fight against Xuarez to the last. But is it wise to scoff at this man as you are doing? I tell you he is a master-spirit, such as rises once in a century, and, as

such, is all-powerful, even against the great power of the Republic. He is one of those men who change the destinies of nations. A Napoleon, a Garibaldi, a Washington. From my soul, Señores, I trust we shall win, and save the Republic ; but it is as well to look on both sides of the question. Blind security is not wise. Por todos Santos, Señores," cried Garibay, rising to his feet in his excitement, "see how this man has already succeeded. Acauhtzin, the most important town next to the capital, is in his hands, our fleet has gone over entirely to his side ; and have you forgotten the treachery of Marina and Pepe. A full plan of the fortifications of Tlatonac is before him. If he can do this much, he can do more. Till the end, I shall support the Republic, and resist a possible Dictator ; but do not sneer at Xuarez ! I tell you he is a great man !"

This was an unexampled outburst for the ordinarily calm Colonel, and he sank back in his chair with a look of agitation on his usually impassive face. The Intendente and Velez were for the moment impressed ; yet, soon recovering their obstinate belief in the invulnerability of the Republic, would have replied, but

that at this moment Don Rafael made his appearance with a small map.

"Your pardon, Señores, that I have been so long!" apologised Rafael, sitting down promptly, and spreading out the map on his own and Philip's knees. "Look, now, mis amigos, and I will tell you how this campaign will be conducted!"

"How do you know, Señor? Are you in the confidence of Xuarez?"

"I am a gentleman, no traitor!" replied Rafael, haughtily, to the insulting question of the Intendente. "I know something of Don Hypolito's plans, because he spoke of them to Don José de Tejada. Before the revolt of the fleet, I was a visitor at the house of that gentleman, and so learned much. Had Don José known that I would remain true to the Republic, he would have been more cautious. As it was, he spoke sufficiently clearly to let me understand the broad outlines of the campaign as designed by Xuarez."

"Bueno!" said the Intendente, politely, "I ask your pardon, Don Rafael. And this plan."

"Behold!" said Rafael, tracing with his finger the various points; "here is Acauhtzin—there Tlatonac!"

—and at the extreme south you see Janjalla! This last town will be attacked first.”

“And the reason?”

“Carrai! can you not see, Señor Garibay? Between Tlatonac and Acauhtzin are nothing but mountains—no roads, no open spaces. All giant hills, terrible precipices, a few paths made by Indians, and inhospitable deserts, where the land happens to be flat for a few miles. How then can Xuarez convey his army to the capital in that direction?”

“True, true! And most of his soldiers are dragoons.”

“Certainly, he could attack Tlatonac with Indians who are used to their rugged country; but savages, as Xuarez well knows, can do little or nothing against trained troops. In conjunction with his own army, they can do something; but, alone, they are almost useless. Bueno! You see he, will not attack from the north.”

“But why attack Janjalla instead of Tlatonac?” asked Tim, who was anxiously following this discussion, pencil and note-book in hand.

“Look to the south,” replied Don Rafael, promptly

"No mountains between Janjalla and Tlatonac—nothing but rich plains—broad spaces on which armies can manœuvre. Now, if Xuarez conveys his troops by the war-ships south to Janjalla, he can bombard and perhaps take that city."

"I, the Intendente, deny that!"

"Impossible to take Janjalla," echoed Velez, nodding his head wisely.

Rafael shrugged his shoulders. It was next to impossible to argue with these obstinate people who would only look at one side of the question.

"We will grant that Janjalla falls into the power of Xuarez," said Garibay, impatiently; "and afterwards?"

"Afterwards," resumed the young man, "Xuarez will garrison the town, and concentrate all his troops there."

"Thus leaving Acauhtzin open to attack," said Jack, satirically.

"By no means. The war-ships will prevent our troops getting to that town. We cannot get to it by land, and the sea will be blockaded by the rebel fleet."

"Unless the torpederas——"

“True ! unless the torpederas arrive,” replied Rafael significantly ; “but it is doubtful as to whether the Junta or Xuarez will get them. However, I am only supposing all these things being in favour of the *Oppositores*.”

“Bueno ! We will look at the matter from Don Hypolito’s point of view,” said Philip, quietly. “His troops are concentrated at Janjalla. Between that town and Tlatonac are open plains—and,” added Philip, dryly, “the armies of the Republic !”

“Certainly. But let us presume, for the sake of argument, that Xuarez makes three simultaneous attacks. With his regular army on the plains, with the Indians from the north on Tlatonac—and from the sea by a bombardment from the war-ships.”

“Dios !” muttered Garibay, biting his fingers ; “that man is a general.”

“The troops of the Republic will conquer everywhere,” said Don Alonzo, gravely.

“Everywhere !” repeated his umbra.

“It is to be hoped so, Señores,” said Tim, significantly, “the Republic will need all the help she can get to defend herself in three places at once.”

"In my opinion," observed Rafael, calmly, "there is only one way to end the war."

"And that is?"

"By a naval victory. The Junta must secure the torpederas. We must have more war-ships, and cripple Don Hypolito's power on the sea. Then he will be unable to convey his troops to Janjalla—unable to bombard Tlatonac, and remain shut up in Acauhtzin, where we can crush him at our leisure."

Garibay disagreed with this view of the matter, and accused Rafael of looking solely at the matter from a naval point of view. A hot discussion ensued, in which every possible attack, repulse, strategy, and battle, was talked over far into the night. Philip and Jack grew weary of this incessant argument, and slipped down to the saloon, where they chatted about Dolores. Overhead they heard the hot-tempered Spaniards arguing fiercely, and several times thought they would come to blows so warm grew the discussion.

"Egad, Jack! I'm glad this voyage ends tomorrow," said Philip, as they turned in, "or they will certainly murder one another."

A grunt was Jack's unsatisfactory reply. He was, almost asleep, and already dreaming of rescuing Dolores from the clutches of Don Hypolito.

After a time, those on deck grew tired of such unprofitable talk, and one by one came down to snatch a few hours' sleep. In the space of fifteen minutes everyone was snoring, and the yacht flew northward with her cargo of sleeping men. Benker was in charge of the wheel, and as he had been in these waters years before, knew every inch of the coast. Keeping the boat about a mile from the shore, he headed her straight for Acauhtzin, which was many miles away, in the curve of the land where it stretched eastward into the Carribean Sea.

It was a perfectly calm night. Stars and moon, a placid sea, and the yacht swirling through the liquid plain with a slight roll. To the right, the infinite expanse of the waters heaving against the horizon ; to the left, the long, low line of the coast, with its dim masses of foliage, and here and there a snow-clad mountain peak. Benker twirled the wheel, chewed his quid, and looked every now and then in disgust at the sleeping forms of the soldiers encum-

bering the white decks of the yacht. Moonlight and starlight, the throb of the screw, the singing of the wind through the rigging, and the hiss of the waves seething past; it was wonderfully beautiful. The boat sped onward like a shadow amid a world of shadows, and the most prosaic soul would have been touched by the profound beauty of this watery world. Not so Simon Benker. He was used to it all, and regarded nothing but his work and the soldiers.

Then the east began to palpitate with the coming dawn. Lines of dim light low down on the horizon—yellow bands which melted to pale green, and flushed to delicate rose colours. Higher and higher the coming day dyed the sky in opaline hues, the stars fled westward, the wan moon paling before this fierce splendour, hid her face behind a bank of clouds. The dark world of waters became tinged with rainbow hues, then one thick yellow shaft of light smote the zenith with heavy brilliance. Ray after ray shot out like the spokes of a wheel, and suddenly the intolerable glory of the sun leaped from the nether world.

“Yonder,” said Jack to Philip, who had come on

deck to see the sunrise, "yonder, my boy, is the Harlequin Opal!"

"If it is as brilliant and as many-tinted as that," replied the baronet, staring at the gorgeous sky and sea, "it must, indeed, be a wonderful gem. Benker, how is she going?"

"You have no soul," said Duval, turning away. "I am going down to have a tub."

He thereupon vanished again, was shortly followed by Philip, after he had satisfied himself that *The Bohemian* had done good work during the hours of darkness. Afterwards they awoke their sleeping companions, and had breakfast, when the Spaniards were introduced to several English dishes, of which they approved greatly.

The heavens were now a pale turquoise blue, the sun mounting towards the zenith was already beginning to burn hotly, and all were assembled on deck impatiently waiting to catch sight of their destination. Here and there on the green shore, amid the forests they could see Indian settlements, and at times light canoes skimmed the surface of the waves. Towards eleven o'clock a white spot appeared on the land

straight ahead. Don Rafael, who was standing by Philip, touched the young man's arm.

"Acauhtzin!" he said, cheerfully; "we will be there in the hour." Philip looked at his watch.

"We left Tlatonac at four yesterday. We will reach Acauhtzin at twelve to-day. Three hundred miles in twenty hours. That is not bad for slow steaming. Had I kept her at full speed, she would have done it in fifteen!"

Tim, who had his glass up, gave an exclamation of surprise.

"What is it, Tim?"

"Three war-ships are lying in the harbour."

"I thought as much," replied Philip, calmly; "we will have to run the blockade."

Tim pointed upward to the Union Jack.

"If they fire on that," he said slowly, "Xuarez is not the clever man I take him to be. What do you say, Jack?"

"Say!" repeated Jack, who was looking ahead with clenched fists, "that one of those three ships is *The Pizarro*, and that Dolores is on board."

CHAPTER II.

ACAUHTZIN.

Here, where mingle rocks and sands,
 Phantom-like the city stands,
 Looming vague and ghostly pale,
 Through the dawning's misty veil.
 Day and night, and night and day,
 At the foot of ramparts grey ;
 Just a stone-throw up the shore
 Ever-hungry surges roar,
 As they would rejoice to tear
 From her heights that city fair,
 Where, engirt by forests green,
 Proud she sits, a laurelled queen ;
 Dim the mighty fabric gleams,
 As thought-built in magic dreams,
 'Tis some palace city hoary,
 Famed in song for golden glory,
 Which, at dawn, will fade away,
 In the traitor light of day.

THE city of Acauhtzin was not unlike the capital in appearance, though it differed from Tlatonac in being built on a projecting point of land, instead of on a hill. On either side were mountains, partially

enclosing a deep basin, wherein the war-ships were anchored, and on a tongue of rock jutting into the centre of this pool the city was built. The walls white and glistening, arose sheer from the rocky cliffs and above them only a few steeples and towers could be seen. The walls encompassing the tongue of rock formed a kind of citadel, and then ran along the inshore for some distance on each side, terminating in well-defended forts. At the back of the city arose a high mountain, clothed with green forests, from amidst which a mighty peak of snow shot up grandly into the blue sky.

Philip saw all this when the yacht was some distance away, and at once pronounced his opinion of the place.

"It is like Valetta," he said, handing the glass to Jack. "The city is built on a tongue of land, the walls rise in the same precipitous fashion, and there are harbours on either side. Were it not for that mighty peak, and the mountains to right and left, it would be the Valetta of the old world."

On the flag-tower of the principal fort floated the banner of the insurgent leader, the same in all respects

as that of the Republic, save that the colour was red instead of yellow. The Harlequin Opal was so interwoven with the history and superstitions of the Cholacacans that Xuarez could not afford to dispense with so powerful a symbol, and on the crimson ground of the flag gleamed the representation of the stone, shooting its myriad rays. At the entrance of the harbour were anchored two heavily armed war-ships, which Don Rafael recognised as *The Cortes* and *The Columbus*. His own vessel, *The Pizarro*, lay further in to the shore, almost across the gate which pierced the wall of the great fort, and gave admission to the city.

With the Union Jack flying at her masthead *The Bohemian* steamed boldly into the harbour between the threatening bulk of the two men-of-war. Through their glasses, those on board the yacht could see there was much excitement at her unexpected appearance both on the ships and on shore. A crowd of people poured out of the gate like a swarm of bees, as *The Bohemian*, slowing down her engines, swung gracefully to anchor beside *The Pizarro*. Just as she cleared the war-ships at the entrance, a puff of smoke broke

from the black sides of *The Cortes*, whereat Tim uttered an exclamation of rage.

"It's insulting the flag they are!"

"No. Blank cartridge," replied Philip, shrewdly; "they are saluting the Union Jack. Don Hypolito evidently wants to stand well with England. See, they are dipping their flags."

The three war-ships lowered their pennants for a moment, in salutation to the English flag, and then ran them up again to the masthead. Philip had by this time brought *The Bohemian* directly under the guns of the forts; so that, in any event, she would be safe. The forts could not depress their guns sufficiently to damage her, and the war-ships would not dare to fire lest they should injure the ramparts of the town.

Making everything safe by this artful manœuvre Philip, with the sanction of Don Alonzo, hauled down the Union Jack, to hoist the Republican banner. At first the forts thought the English ship was responding to their salute, and several guns thundered a welcome to the stranger, while the crowd on the shore cheered lustily. All these greetings, however, were

changed to cries of anger when the yellow banner of Tlatonac flew up to the masthead of *The Bohemian*. Without doubt, had the yacht been outside, the war-ships would have opened fire on this audacious vessel, to make her pay for such insolence ; but Philip, being safe under the walls of the fort, could fly the flag with impunity.

The crowd on the beach and wharf roared with rage, as they saw the hated ensign, and recognised the fact that by this audacious piece of strategy a band of their enemies had gained admission into the very heart of their harbour. Had those on shore been able to get on board *The Bohemian* it would have gone ill with Philip and his friends ; but, fortunately, the yacht had cast anchor some distance away, by the side of *The Pizarro*. The crew of the war-ship lined the side of their vessel to look at the daring intruder, and seeing this, Don Rafael, suppressing all outward signs of rage, swore fluently to himself as he recognised the renegades.

In a remarkably short space of time, a boat with the rebel flag hanging over its stern pulled out from the shore, and in a few minutes came alongside *The Bohe-*

mian. A ladder was thrown over at once, and there stepped on deck Don José de Tejada, accompanied by a few officers. He recognised Don Alonzo and his friends at once, for they had been intimates of his before the outbreak of this fratricidal war.

“Don Rafael! Don Alonzo,” said Tejada, in astonishment. “What is the meaning of this, Señores? and how have you the hardihood to display the flag of Tlatonac under the guns of Acauhtzin?”

“I, the Intendente, with these gentlemen, have come hither on a mission to Don Hypolito Xuarez from the Junta of Cholocaca.”

“Oh, you would make peace. The Junta fears the result of an appeal to arms.”

“Carajo, no!” cried Garibay, clapping his hand to his sword. “The Junta fears nothing; much less the rebel Xuarez.”

“Beware, Señor,” said Tejada, as several of his officers muttered angrily; “I cannot protect you, if thus you speak of our honoured President.”

“President!” cried Rafael, in a rage.

“Yes; the President of Cholocaca.”

“Don Francisco Gomez is President?”

"By the will of the aristocrats," said Don José fiercely; "but Don Hypolito Xuarez is President by the will of the people."

"Enough of this," exclaimed the Intendente, waving his hand; "we are here under a flag of truce. Even you, Señor, must respect that. We will deliver our message to Xuarez, and depart unharmed."

"That is as Don Hypolito wills it."

"Your pardon, Señor," interposed Philip, taking off his yachting cap; "this is an English vessel, and as such you dare not seize her."

"I recognise no vessel as English under those colours," said Tejada, fiercely, pointing to the opal banner.

"Bueno! I will endeavour to remove your prejudice."

In another moment Philip had given orders to Benker, and the Union Jack was flying at the other masthead.

"You must respect our neutrality now, Señor."

Don José bit his lip, and turning to one of his officers, gave an order. The soldier bowed, dropped over the side of the yacht, and went ashore in the boat.

"I have sent to tell Don Hypolito that an embassy has come from Tlatonac," said Tejada, addressing the Intendente with marked coldness; "in ten or fifteen minutes you shall know his decision."

"He must receive us, Señor."

"No doubt; but the question is, will he let you depart?"

"By the law of nations, which recognises the white flag, he must let us go as we came, unharmed."

"Had you not sailed under the English ensign, you would not have got into the harbour so easily. This boat would be now sunk by the guns of *The Cortes*."

"I thought as much," said Philip, easily; "therefore I flew a flag which even you had to respect."

"And may I ask, Señores," sneered Don José, with elaborate politeness, "under which flag you sail? the English, the Opal, or the White?"

"Under the white," replied Garibay, promptly.

"Good! Then lower those two banners, and run up the white flag."

"I'll see you hanged first!" retorted Philip, bluntly. "This is an English vessel, and I defy you to touch it or the flag."

Tejada blushed red with rage, for he knew that Xuarez, anxious to stand well in his quarrel with the great nations of Europe, would not dare to insult the Union Jack. In fact, seeing that the deputation had arrived in an English vessel, Tejada was well assured in his own mind that it would be received and sent away with the utmost courtesy, let their message from the Junta be galling as it might be. Xuarez was no barbarian, and in any case would have treated a flag of truce with honour, but the presence of these English gentlemen, of this English ship, put the matter beyond all doubt.

Under these circumstances, Tejada was unable to reply to Sir Philip ; but suppressing his wrath with a great effort, bowed politely and turned away. As he did so, Don Rafael sprang forward, as also did Jack, both eager to learn if Dolores was in the town.

"I will speak, amigo," said Rafael, hurriedly to Jack. "I know Don José, as my private friend, though public enemy ; he will answer me."

"Your servant, Señor !" remarked Tejada, stiffly, finding himself face to face with Don Rafael.

"Señor," said the young man, taking off his som-

brero with ceremonious politeness, "we are enemies because we follow different leaders ; but I implore you, by the friendship which once existed between us, to answer a question I would ask."

"Surely, Señor! You were ever welcome at my table, in time of peace. As you say, we are now enemies; but God forbid that this unhappy war should banish all courtesies between gentlemen. What question do you wish to put, Señor? It shall be answered."

"Is my cousin—is Doña Dolores at Acauhtzin?"

Tejada started, and seemed much surprised.

"No, Señor Maraquando, she is not here. Why ask me such a strange question?"

"Not here!" cried Jack, who also knew Tejada well; "but she must be here, Señor Tejada; she has been carried off from Tlatonac, taken on board yonder vessel,"—pointing to *The Pizarro*—"and is now in Acauhtzin with Don Hypolito."

"I swear to you, Señor Duval, that you wrong us. You wrong Don Hypolito," replied Don Jose, earnestly. "I am aware that our leader loves Doña Dolores, and desires to marry her, but he would not carry her off so basely. No, Señor," continued

Tejada, proudly ; “ we are men of honour, we do not make war on women. When Don Hypolito conquers, he will ask for the honour of Doña Dolores’ hand in due form. She is not here, I swear.”

“ Great Heavens ! ” cried Jack, in despair. “ Can this be true ? ”

“ Don José,” said Rafael, eagerly, “ I know you to be a man of honour. I do not doubt your word ; but I feel sure that my cousin is here.”

“ Señor ! ”

“ I do not say that you know, or are deceiving me,” went on Rafael, rapidly. “ But look you, Don José. There is a zambo called Pepe, who acted as a spy for your party at Tlatonac. The other night he decoyed my cousin from the cathedral on board *The Pizarro*. A fisherman saw Pepe rowing to the warship, with a female in his boat.”

“ Bueno ! That is so,” interrupted Tejada, bluntly ; “ but the woman was a poblana—one Marina.”

“ Marina ! ” cried Duval, savagely. “ Then I have been tricked. We have all been wrong ! Doña Dolores must be with the Indians.”

“ I trust, Señor, your fears are groundless ; but if

Doña Dolores is with the Indians, she will be quite safe. They reverence her as the guardian of the Chalchuih Tlatonac."

"Does Don Hypolito know anything about the Indians?" asked Rafael, hurriedly.

"That question, Señor, I am not at liberty to answer."

Rafael cast one swift and penetrating glance at the impassive face of the old man, and turned away with a suppressed oath.

"Carrai!" he muttered, fiercely, to Philip, who stood by, a silent spectator. "I believe Xuarez is in league with the Indians, and has made them carry her off. If she is not here, she is at that hidden temple; but, in either case, Don Hypolito is mixed up with the case."

"In my humble opinion, she is at Acauhtzin," said Philip, quietly. "Don José does not know all the black dealings of Xuarez's heart. Cheer up, my dear Jack, we will soon see Don Hypolito, and wring the truth from him."

Jack muttered something indistinctly, and turned away, whereon Philip, taking him kindly by the arm,

led him down to the saloon, with the intention of giving him such consolation as he was able.

"If she is here, Xuarez must know," said Philip, earnestly ; "and if he knows, he will not be able to deceive me. I can read most faces, and it will be strange indeed if Don Hypolito's is the first to baffle me."

"Don José denies everything."

"Yes ; because Don José knows nothing. That old man is a pompous old ass, like the Intendente. Many things could take place under his nose without his being any the wiser. Drink this glass of wine, my dear lad, and keep up your spirits. We will find Dolores yet."

Duval was so overcome by the loss of Dolores that he submitted to Philip's orders like a child, and obediently drank the wine poured out for him. In most emergencies, Jack would have been ready to act at once with a cool head, and iron nerve ; but Dolores was very dear to him, and her loss had rendered him useless for the moment—in other words, the shock had paralysed his will.

After Philip had succeeded in putting some heart

into the poor fellow, he insisted on his coming on deck, and they ascended thereto just in time to see the return of the officer sent by Tejada to Don Hypolito. The messenger walked straight up to Don José, and gave the reply of Xuarez, on hearing which, Tejada turned towards the waiting Intendente.

“His Excellency Don Hypolito Xuarez will see you at his palace.”

Don Alonzo almost choked with rage at hearing these terms applied to a rebel like Xuarez, but managed to bow with tolerably good grace. He moved towards the side of the yacht, and scrambled down into the boat in a somewhat ungraceful fashion for an ambassador. Colonel Garibay, Don Rafael, and the Englishmen followed, together with Tejada and his staff.

Tim, who had been fraternising with the rebels, showed his note-book to Jack, filled with shorthand notes.

“I’ve got no end of information,” he said gleefully; “and when I get back to Tlatonac, it goes to the *Morning Planet* straight.”

"That is if we ever do get back," said Jack, gloomily.

"Of course we will, you pessimist ; and, what's more, we'll take back Dona Dolores with us."

"Do you think she is here, then, after all?" asked Duval, with reviving hope.

Tim winked in a vulgar fashion.

"A word in your ear, Jack," he said, jerking his head in the direction of the pompous Tejada. "that old man's a liar. The pretty colleen is here, and Don José knows it? but she's not with Don Hypolito."

"Then where do you think she is?"

"With Rafael's sweetheart, no less ; the old man's daughter."

"Doña Carmencita?"

"You've hit it."

Jack would have questioned Tim further, so as to learn his grounds for such a belief, but just then the boat touched the stone steps of the wharf. The embassy stepped ashore, and waited till the soldiers of Tlatonac arrived. Don Alonzo, with a due regard for the dignity of the Republic, refused to move until his

bodyguard came on shore. In a few minutes, the soldiers landed, under the command of Captain Velez, and thus escorted, the ambassador of the Republic moved slowly forward, beneath the mighty arch which led into the heart of the rebel capital.

"We've got in, Senor," whispered Rafael to Philip with sudden doubt ; "but I hope we shall be able to get out."

Philip pointed back to the Union Jack, which could be seen in the distance at the yacht's masthead.

"While that flag is there I have no fear, Don Rafael."

CHAPTER III.

DON HYPOLITO XUAREZ.

A visionary? Wherefore not? All men
 Who change the world are dreamers in their youth.
 Thought comes before fulfilment !—in the earth,
 The hidden seedling hints the future flower !
 So is it with this man ! For years his brain
 Hath dallied with a thousand fantasies,
 Which had no being save within himself.
 But now his dreams take shape !—with purpose firm,
 He aids their due fulfilment, till therefrom
 New heavens and earth are formed, and ancient things
 Crashing to ruin, as foundations serve
 Whereon to build earth's future destinies.

THERE was no doubt that Don Hypolito laid due stress on ceremonial observances as necessary to consolidate his pretensions. On the ground that Gomez had broken the constitutional rules by which he held his position, Xuarez proclaimed himself saviour and President of the Cholocacan Republic. Not being in possession of Tlatonac, he constituted Acauhtzin his capital for the time being, and there

assumed all the airs of a ruler. He called himself by the title of President, his personal staff and intimate friends constituted a kind of revolutionary Junta, and the building in which this illegal assemblage met for conference was dignified with the name of the Palacio Nacional. In all respects the machinery of the lawful Government was copied at Acauhtzin, and that town was regarded by the Oposidores as the true capital of the country until such time as Xuarez should enforce his pretensions by marching in triumph into the head city of the Republic. As in the Middle Ages two Popes ruled—the one at Rome, the other at Avignon—so the allegiance of Cholacaca was claimed by two Presidents: Gomez at Tlatonac, Xuarez at Acauhtzin.

The extraordinary man who avowed himself the saviour of type country possessed in a marked degree that power of dominating all with whom he came in contact by the personal charm of his manner. This dæmonic influence is a peculiar characteristic of all great men, without which they could not hope to accomplish their missions. Napoleon changed the map of Europe, Mahomet created a religion, Cæsar

consolidated the Roman Empire, Luther tore half the civilised world from the grip of ecclesiastical Rome. These great events sprang in the first instance from the strong personality of the men who accomplished them, hence the performance of what appear to be miracles. Don Hypolito Xuarez, son of a Spanish adventurer and an Indian woman, possessed this dæmonic influence, and gifted with such power, arose from obscurity to the full glory of supreme power. Nowhere was his authority more noticeable than in Acauhtzin. Years before a political adventurer, he had been accepted by the people of that town as their deputy to the Junta. Acauhtzin, always jealous of the superiority of Tlatonac, was desirous that the seat of Government should be transferred thither from the city of the opal. This ambition was fostered by the crafty Xuarez, who saw therein a safe way of gaining the love of the northern capital. After he had accused Gomez in the Junta of breaking the rules of the constitution, he came northward to claim the protection of his constituents, a protection which was freely accorded to one who had their interests so much at heart.

Cunning Don Hypolito saw his position and how he could better it. Casting all his fortunes on one bold stroke, he assembled the townspeople in the great plaza, and harangued them with all his marvellous powers of oratory. Gomez had tampered with the sacred constitution of Cholocaca. Gomez was therefore unworthy to occupy the Presidential chair. One man alone could save the country, that man was himself. Let them throw in their fortunes with his, and resort to arms to enforce his elevation to the supreme power. Then he would transfer the seat of Government from Tlatonac to Acauhtzin, and the northern port would become the greatest city in Central America. Dazzled by this vision, the townspeople elected Don Hypolito President with enthusiasm, and vowed to stand by him to the end. That end they never for a moment doubted would be victory over the established Government, and the transference of the seat of power from Tlatonac to Acauhtzin. They firmly believed in Don Hypolito as the man of the future, and when, by a skilful stroke of diplomacy, he secured the support of the Regimiento de Huitzilopochtli and of the fleet, his triumph was complete.

He who could do so much could do more! The admiring townsfolk swore by the brilliant adventurer, and when the message carried by Don Alonzo arrived at the northern capital, the crafty Mestizo was the idol of the populace. The ironical part of the whole affair was that he had no intention of fulfilling any promises made to his trusting constituents.

Jack, owing to his long residence in Tlatonac, was already acquainted with Xuarez, but both Tim and Philip were exceedingly curious to behold this man, of whom they had heard so much, and who seemed to hold the destinies of the Republic in the hollow of his hand. In the Great hall of the Palacio Nacional (so called) they beheld him for the first time, waiting to receive the emissaries of the Government. Surrounded by a brilliant throng of officers, he alone was plainly dressed, no uniform, no gaudy tints, no decorations, yet his personality raised him high above those by whom he was encircled. The supporters of Xuarez were mediocrites; Xuarez himself was a great man.

The revolutionary leader was small of stature, ungraceful in appearance; his legs were short, his body

was long, so that he rather waddled than walked. At first sight this ungainly figure, this ungraceful gait, was apt to bring a smile to the lips of the onlooker, but that smile faded before the grand countenance surmounting the misshapen frame. It was as though the head of a Greek statue had been, by mistake, joined on to the body of a Polynesian idol ; the first was so noble, the latter so grotesque. A Roman head, such as tradition ascribes to the Cæsars, a Napoleonic face, calm, powerful, terrible as the impassive countenance of the Sphinx. Broad forehead, prominent nose, large eyes, full of fire and determination ; no beard or moustache to hide the contour of the cheeks, the strong curve of the mouth, a skin of marble whiteness, and the whole surmounted by masses of waving hair, dark as the eyes beneath. Such faces are seen on the coins of the Cæsars, on the painted walls of Egyptian tombs, on the carven walls of Assyrian palaces. They belong alone to kings, to heroes, to conquerors. Nature marks her great men thus. When such faces of terrible calm appear at intervals of centuries, mankind trembles, they recognise the scourges of God, destined to overwhelm

the world in waves of blood. Philip came to see Xuarez—he looked, and lo ! Napoleon.

“The struggle is unequal,” he whispered to Jack, as Don Alonzo unrolled his papers.

“Yes,” replied Duval, in the same tone. “His force is too weak to stand against the power of the Junta.”

Philip smiled scornfully.

“What can the Junta do against that face?” he said, contemptuously. “There stands the greatest man in Cholocaca.”

“D——n him,” muttered the engineer, fiercely, “he has carried off Dolores.”

“Silence, boys,” growled Tim, in a voice of subdued thunder, “the Don’s speaking.”

The Intendente was not a particularly brave man, and hardly liked the position in which he now found himself. His mission had appeared to be great and grand and glorious at Tlatonac ! but now it assumed quite a different complexion. To utter threats against the rebel Xuarez, when in the society of friends, was one thing ; to order the followers of the revolutionary President to give him up to punishment, in the middle of his army, was another. Don Alonzo Cebrian hummed

and hawed, and cleared his throat, to get down a nasty lump which impeded his speech. Don Hypolito saw his confusion, but said nothing, he did not even smile, but sat serenely in his chair, impenetrable as the Sphinx. At last the Intendante screwed up his courage and delivered the decree of the Junta—sufficiently badly, it is true—still, he delivered it.

“As the legally qualified representative of the Junta of Cholacaca, in congress assembled, I hereby order those in arms against the Republic to surrender to the Government, and to deliver up for punishment the body of the rebel, Hypolito Xuarez, for——”

He did not finish his sentence. A low murmur of rage arose from the supporters of the rebel leader, and, half-drawing their swords, they looked towards Xuarez for authority to cut down the daring man who had thus insulted him in the midst of his army. Don Alonzo turned pale at the sight of the half-bared weapons, and shrank back among his friends; but Xuarez, leaning his chin on his hand, stared steadily before him and waited. Seeing this impassive demeanour, which he was not clever enough to know was more dangerous than an outburst of rage, Don

Alonzo regained his spirits. A more unfitted diplomatist than Cebrian could scarcely have been chosen.

"I need not speak at any great length," he said, rapidly. "The orders of his Excellency Francisco Gomez are that the town of Acauhtzin surrender to the Government, deliver up the rebel Xuarez for punishment, and submit to the clemency of the Junta. If this is done at once, the Junta will be lenient; if not, the opal standard will be unfurled, and all the inhabitants of Acauhtzin will be treated as rebels. This is the decree of Don Francisco Gomez on the part of the Junta of Cholocaca, delivered by myself the Intendente of Xicotencatl."

Then, Cebrian, having delivered his message sufficiently badly, rolled up his papers with the air of a man who has done his duty, and waited the reply of the rebel leader. All those on the side of Xuarez frowned heavily, but made no demonstration of wrath at the insolence of the message. They waited to hear Don Hypolito speak. The Mestizo arose to his feet, and addressed himself, not to the emissaries of the Republic, but to his own supporters.

"Señores," he said, in a singularly mellow and

powerful voice, "you hear the decree of the so-called Junta of Cholacaca. Lest you should mistake the purport of the message delivered by Don Alonzo Cebrian, I will repeat it shortly. You are to lay down your arms, surrender my body to the Junta, and trust to the tender mercies of your rivals of Tlatonac for judgment. These are the conditions, which, if not accepted, will bring on us the thunderbolts of war from a Government who have not a navy, and scarce an army. Your answer? "

Hitherto he had spoken in a low tone, clear and distinct, but distinguished by no oratorical fire. At the last words, however, his voice rang through the hall like thunder, and he repeated them with emphasis.

"Your answer, Señores? "

"No! no! no! Viva Xuarez! Viva el gefe! Abaja, Gomez! "

Don Hypolito listened to those fierce responses with a smile of pleasure on his usually immobile face, and when the clamour died away, arose slowly to his feet. Facing the messengers of the Republic, he addressed them sharply, laconically.

"You hear, Señores. Go! "

"You refuse!" said Don Alonzo, scarcely able to believe his ears.

"I refuse to surrender myself to your tyrants. The people of Acauhtzin refuse to lay down their arms. Between myself and the illegal Junta now sitting at Tlatonac, there is no friendship, no trust, no faith. They proclaim me a rebel! I, Hypolito Xuarez, proclaim war!"

He flung up his hand with a fiery gesture, and as he did so a hundred swords flashed from their scabbards.

"War!" cried those in the hall. "War! Viva Xuarez!"

Don Alonzo tore the message of the Republic in twain, and cast the pieces at the foot of the dais whereon Xuarez was seated.

"So be it!" he cried, turning his back, "War!"

"Hold!" said Xuarez, in a voice of thunder. "You came, Señores, under the protection of the English flag. You go with the opal banner flying at your masthead. Such a precaution was useless. I am not a barbarian to fire on a flag of truce; but you—

you, Señores, are cowards to thus distrust an honourable foe."

Before the Intendente could speak, Philip sprang forward, and faced the speaker.

"The fault, Señor, if fault it be, is mine. The vessel in which we came is English, and, therefore, flies the English flag. In the port, I hoisted the opal banner, to show that these gentlemen were on board, and had come on a mission from the Junta."

"An excellent explanation!" sneered Hypolito, frowning; "but untrue!"

"Señor!"

"Untrue, I say! You thought I would fire on your ship! You looked on me as a barbaric foe! You mistrusted me!"

"And who would not?" said Jack's deep voice savagely, "who would not mistrust one who makes war on women?"

"Be quiet, Jack."

"I do not understand you, Señor Duval," said Xuarez, who knew the young engineer quite well. "Explain!"

"Doña Dolores, the niece of Don Miguel Mara-

quando, has been kidnapped from Tlatonac ! I accuse you of carrying her off."

"I deny it, Señor ! It is false," cried the rebel leader, a flush reddening the marble whiteness of his face. "Doña Dolores is not in Acauhtzin."

"She may not be here, Señor, but you know where she is !"

"I do not, Señor ! You have no proof of what you say."

"Pepe, the zambo, a spy in your pay, carried off a woman from Tlatonac," cried Rafael, stepping forward. "That woman was my cousin, Dolores."

Xuarez started, and spoke rapidly to one of his officers, who thereupon left the room.

"Ah ! you know much, Señor," he resumed, scornfully ; "but you are wrong ; the zambo was my spy——"

"Carambo !"

"I repeat he was my spy in Tlatonac," said Xuarez, coolly ; "and he left the city with a plan of your fortifications."

"Por todos Santos," roared Garibay, fiercely, clapping his hand on his sword.

"Call on whom you like, Señor Commandante ! I have no reason to hide this from you or from the Junta, else would I have kept silent. I know when to hold my tongue, Señores ; I know when to speak ! I speak now ! Go back and tell your President that I have a full plan of Tlatonac in my possession, and that I will use it to take your city, and level its walls to the ground."

"If you can do so !" said Garibay, tauntingly.

"If I can do so. As you say," replied Xuarez, suddenly recognising that this controversy was unworthy of his rank ; "we need say no more on that subject. Ha !" he added, as the officers, with a man and a woman, entered the hall, "here is Pepe ! and here, Señores, is the woman he carried off."

The woman threw back her rebozo.

"Marina !" cried Jack, in despair.

"You see, Señores," said Don Hypolito, serenely, "I am not the base one you think me to be."

"I'm not so sure of that," muttered Tim, under his breath.

"But this, Señores, is outside the question. You came to me with a message from the Junta. I have

answered that message. Go! Go, and carry back to Tlatonac my defiance and that of Acauhtzin. Sail away under your opal flag, caballeros, and I promise you my guns will respect your vessel. Adios. Go!"

He pointed imperiously down the hall to where the great doors stood wide open, and, headed by Don Alonzo, the deputation retired. Rafael was biting his lips with rage, and Garibay was swearing under his breath. The exit was scarcely dignified or worthy of the greatness of the Republic.

"I never felt so mean in my life," whispered Philip to Tim. "What a beast the man is!"

"And you said he was a great man!"

"So he is. But even great men are human. Xuarez is not perfect; but I believe he is honourable as regards rules of warfare. We can leave the harbour in safety."

"I doubt that, my boy," said Tim, significantly; "the man's a liar!"

"What!" said Jack, overhearing this; "do you think that Dolores——?"

"I think that he knows where she is."

"Then I'll stay here till he gives her up."

"You'll stay here a long time, then. She is not in Acauhtzin."

"Then where is she?"

"It's more nor I know."

They were marching down the street on their way to the sea-gate, surrounded by their own soldiers and a troop of the Regimiento de Huitzilopochtli. Around this living barrier raged the populace, who had heard of the message sent by the Republic, demanding the surrender of Xuarez, and were mad with anger. To give up the idol of their hearts—the man on whom the glorions future of Acauhtzin depended! It was an insult! If they could have got at the emissaries, they would have torn them to pieces; but, fortunately, the line of soldiers prevented this. Don Alonzo was pale with terror, but Rafael and Garibay swore loudly at the rebel crowd. The three Englishmen smiled scornfully and marched serenely along, not heeding the savage howling of the mob, which recognised them as foreigners.

"Abajo los Americanos! Mueram los Yankies!"

"We would have rather a hard time out there," said Philip, as Tim, his huge frame shaking with

anger, ranged alongside of him. "Keep together boys. Where's Jack?"

"Behind, with Don Rafael. Don't trouble, Philip; Jack Duval has his six-shooter on him."

"Good! I hope I am not a coward," said the baronet, serenely, as a clod of earth hit him on the shoulder; "but I will be glad when we are safe on board *The Bohemian*."

"So will I. This is like Donnybrook Fair. But we're nearly outside the town. Glory be to the saints!"

As they approached the gate, the fury of the mob increased, and it took all the strength of the soldiers, tramping shoulder to shoulder, to prevent them breaking through and falling on the emissaries of the Junta. At the gate, however, a soldier stumbled and fell, whereon, through the gap thus formed, a torrent of men rushed, shouting wildly. The escort fought bravely, and the rebel soldiers did their best to save the ambassadors. It would be a disgrace to Acauhtzin to let the mob have their will.

Inch by inch they fought their way down to the sea-shore, surrounded by the howling multitude.

Philip knocked down a man who tried to snatch his watch-chain, and Tim, head and shoulders above the torrent of humanity, whacked every head he saw heartily with his heavy stick. "When you see a head, hit it." That was Tim's rule of warfare. He picked it up at Donnybrook Fair, and applied it practically in his present predicament.

At the water's edge they were hurried into several boats, and amid a shower of stones and mud, managed to get on board the yacht. As soon as all were on deck, Benker, without waiting for instructions, started the boat. Philip stood at the side of the ship and shook his fist at the shore.

"You scoundrels!" he raged, fiercely. "You dishonourable wretches."

"And Xuarez is a great man," scoffed Tim, wiping the blood from his face.

"Well," retorted Philip, viciously, "he's not responsible for this mob."

"When we return," swore Rafael, who stood near him, "we will level those walls with the sand."

By this time the yacht had passed out of the

harbour, and was steaming between the two war-ships. Don Alonzo began to recover his courage.

"Thanks to the Holy Virgin, we are all safe, Señores," he said, in a trembling voice. "The Junta will bitterly resent this insult shown to the Intendente of Xicotencatl."

"Philip looked around with an alarmed expression of countenance.

"Where's Jack?"

"Jack!" cried Tim, in a stentorian voice.

There was no answer.

"Señor Juan was with me," said Rafael, quickly, "but I lost him from my side outside the gate."

"He must be down below," said Philip, greatly disturbed, and went off to the cabin. In a few moments he reappeared.

"He is not there. My God! Can he be lost?"

The yacht was searched thoroughly, but no trace of Jack Duval could be found. Philip wanted to put back and rescue his friend, who had been evidently left ashore.

"Impossible, Señor!" cried Don Alonzo, in alarm; "it is dangerous."

"I do not care. Do you think I am going to leave my dear friend to be torn to pieces by these savages?" raged Philip, stamping his foot.

"The soldiers will protect him," said Garibay, who was terribly upset at the discovery of their loss. He was very fond of Jack.

"Did they protect us?" said Tim, who was quite beside himself with grief and rage. "Turn her head back, Philip."

Don Rafael, Tim, and the baronet were all in favour of doing this, but Don Alonzo and Garibay said it would be madness. By this time they were beyond the range of the fort guns, and in safety; but notwithstanding the remonstrances of the terrified Intendente, Philip altered the course of the boat, and started back to the harbour.

"I will save Jack, if I die for it," he said, fiercely.

Just as *The Bohemian* approached the warships, a puff of smoke burst from the sides of both, and two balls ricocheted across the waves.

"Not blank cartridge this time," muttered Tim, grimly, "The dirty cowards, to fire on an unarmed boat. And the forts!"

One! two! three! four! A perfect cannonade thundered from the forts, and one of the spars of the boat was carried away. The warships repeated their fire, and, against his will, Philip was forced to stop the engines. It was no use running into a hornet's nest. Another quarter of a mile, nay less, and *The Bohemian* would be smashed to pieces. The engines were reversed, and Philip shook his fist wildly at the town.

"First Dolores! then Jack! Oh, cursed, cursed town!"

CHAPTER IV.

RIVALS.

I this side ! You that side !—a woman between us,
 You love her !—I love her !—each fain would caress her.
 By Paul, I will never surrender this Venus,
 For I in my arms would for ever possess her.

You say that she loves you ! A lie !—for she told me
 Her heart had no caring for love or for lover.
 Let her but a moment behold you ! behold me !
 And he whom she chooses we'll quickly discover.

Well, say !—we'll suppose it !—to you she is tender !
 And goes with you thither ; while I remain lonely,
 Think you that this woman I thus would surrender ?
 Nay ! she shall remain with me ! mine to be only.

Why, you are my captive ! but though I can slay you !
 Give over this folly—you'll find me a true man !
 Nay more, you are free, honoured, wealthy—what say you ?
 What madman refuse you !—then lose life and woman.

JACK recovered his senses in complete darkness. He put his hand to his head and heard the clank of a fetter, felt the cold iron clasp his wrist. He moved his legs, more chains, and the unexpected discovery that he was lying on straw. Not a ray of light any-

where to be seen. On all sides darkness, the darkness of Egypt. Rolling heavily to one side with a groan of pain forced from him by his aching head, he felt the cold chill of a stone floor. Straw, chains, stones, darkness! What did it all mean? He tried to think, but his head was confused, stunned as with a blow. It was a blow! For at the back of his cranium he felt a wound, his fingers were moist with his own blood.

Slowly, slowly, his scattered senses came back to him, and he strove to recall all that had taken place since he had left the Palacio Nacional. Yes! he had gone down the street with the rest of his friends. Rafael had walked by his side, Philip and Tim had marched on in front. Then the howling mob on all sides dashing itself against the lines of soldiers. A dragoon had fallen by the sea-gate just as they were on the verge of safety—the mob rushed in through the gap—then he remembered fighting desperately—a blow on the head—a cowardly blow delivered from behind, and he remembered no more. Remembrance ceased with that blow, it revived again here in darkness, with him lying on a straw bed chained like

a prisoner. A prisoner! Jack saw his position in a moment—he was in prison, at the mercy of his rival, of the lover of Dolores, of Don Hypolito Xuarez, rebel and traitor.

“Great Heaven,” moaned Jack, as the horrors of his situation slowly dawned on his confused brain, “this must all have been designed by that scoundrel, Xuarez. His promises that we should go unscathed were all lies. Philip! Tim! poor Rafael! Where are they now? Perhaps in this accursed prison.”

It was so dark that he was afraid to move lest he should fall into danger. At length he put out his hand cautiously, and, kneeling forward, felt all round his bed. The straw was simply thrown on the floor in a heap, and on three sides he found nothing but the pavement, on the fourth the massive stones of the wall. Unexpectedly his hand touched a crock of water, and drawing this towards him, he found it full, much to his delight, as, owing to his wound, he was consumed with a burning thirst. After taking a good draught, he sat back on his straw to think of what he should do next.

Jack was always cool in time of danger. The

obstacles which would have appalled other men only sharpened his wits, and as his brain was now clearer, he set himself to work to think over the situation. Before doing this, however, he soaked his handkerchief in the little water remaining at the bottom of the crock, and bound it round his head, The cool cloth somewhat assuaged the throbbing of his wound and thus quieted his heated brain.

On leaving Tlatonac, Jack and his friends had doffed their fine uniforms as likely to compromise them in the eyes of Xuarez, and reassumed their European garb. He was, therefore, dressed in a Norfolk jacket, with trousers of rough blue serge, these latter being tucked into high riding-boots of untanned leather. The pith helmet he had worn had evidently been knocked off in the struggle at the sea-gate, as his head was bare ; but, on feeling his pockets, he found everything else was safe. Money, knife, keys, they were all there ; but his revolver was gone, a loss which he much regretted.

The first thing he did was to remove his fetters, which he managed with some difficulty and the assistance of his knife. Luckily they were only of light

steel, and had evidently been put on more through the malignity of Xuarez than because they prevented his escape. Indeed, it was a useless precaution, for, even now that they were removed, he knew not where he was, and in which direction to turn for egress. With his knife he managed to bend back the links of one chain so that it parted, leaving the steel ring still on the wrist ; but, with considerable pain to his hand, he managed to slip it through the other. As regards the rings round his ankles, Jack was unusually powerful, and, in spite of his wound, with the strength of despair, managed to wrench the locks of the chains asunder. The steel chains were old and badly made, else he would not have freed himself so easily ; but as it was, after half-an-hour's hard work, he managed to get rid of the chains, and stood up with no manacles on him, save the steel ring on his left wrist, with a few links dangling therefrom.

Free so far, he next placed his head against the rough damp stones of the wall, and cautiously moved round his cell. A few steps from his bed brought him against another wall, at right angles to the former. Following this, he soon arrived at the other side of

the prison, and felt his way along the opposite wall. Towards the end of this, he stumbled over a flight of squat, stone steps, projecting into the prison, and by careful touching, managed to ascertain that those led up to a low door of wood, clasped with iron. Beyond, a short space, and another wall, at right angles, and so back to his straw bed, on which he resumed his seat.

"Fifteen by twenty," muttered Jack, taking another drink of water, "and steps leading down from the door. Damp walls too. I guess this cage is in the basement of one of the forts, or below the Palacio Nacional. That cursed Xuarez! One of his men stunned me in that fight with a foul blow, and they then clapped me in here. I wonder what he intends to do with me. He knows I love Dolores, and am his rival ; so I expect he'll make things pretty hot for me, if he can. Well, at all events, my life is safe, for what with Philip and Tim to stand by me, he dare not kill me."

Then a sudden dread entered his mind regarding Philip and the war correspondent.

"If they should be killed in that row, or clapped

in prison also ! No, I don't believe that. Putting Philip out of the question, Xuarez is too cunning to hurt a war correspondent of a great English paper. He wants to stand well with the world in this struggle, and would not dare to risk the outcry of anything happening to Tim. I expect they all got back safely to the yacht. Xuarez could afford to let them go with his defiance to Tlatonac. He only wanted me because I am his rival in the affections of Dolores. The question is, has he got her in his power also ? He says 'no,' but the man's a liar, whom it is impossible to believe. Hang this wound."

It was burning with heat, and taking off the bandage, he dipped it into the dregs of water remaining. Then he bound it over the wound again, and took out his watch, which luckily had not been stolen, as it was safely stowed inside his Norfolk jacket. With his fingers, he delicately felt the hands.

"Six o'clock !" he said, somewhat startled ; "and we left the palace at three. I've been three hours in this cursed hole. It must be still light, or, rather, twilight ; so, as it is here as dark as pitch, this cell must be built far down. Hang them ! do they intend to starve me ?"

He felt vainly for the traditional loaf of bread, which always accompanies the pitcher of water in prisons, but, to his dismay, could find none. This pointed to one of two things. Either Xuarez intended to starve him to death, or would visit him shortly with a meal. He would not dare to do the former, as Jack, feeling sure his friends had escaped, knew the outcry of these against the rebel leader would be great, did he carry his hatred so far; and as to the latter, the young man hopefully waited, in the hope that his gaoler would soon arrive.

"He won't come himself, I suppose," said Jack, throwing himself down on his straw; "some soldiers will come and escort me to the upper world. Hang it! if the man isn't a thorough blackguard, he'll let me have a meal and a doctor. My head is aching like, to split. Even a candle would be acceptable in this infernal gloom."

Clearly there was nothing for it but to wait till some one entered the cell. Jack was too wise to waste his time in kicking at the door, or exhaust his strength in shouting for help. He was in the power of Xuarez, and it depended on future events as to how

matters would turn out. Of one thing Jack felt confident, and that was that even if Philip and the others reached the yacht in safety they could do nothing.

"I guess Xuarez brought the guns to bear on *The Bohemian*, and ordered Philip to clear out. He could do nothing against that order, so I expect the boat is by this time on her way back to Tlatonac with the news of my capture or death. I'll have to wait here until the Junta captures the town, and Lord only knows when that will be. I wouldn't mind so much if I only knew of the whereabouts of Dolores."

Thus talking to himself, in order to keep up his spirits, this unfortunate young man sat for some considerable time, waiting with philosophic resignation the turn of events. By means of his watch, he calculated that it was close on eight o'clock before he was disturbed. Then he heard the sound of a bolt slipping out of its socket, the door of his cell opened, and a man appeared. A man draped in a long black cloak, flung Spanish fashion over his left shoulder, and wearing a broad-leaved sombrero which effectually concealed his features. He carried a lantern

which illuminated the cell with a sufficiently feeble light, but it was comforting to Jack, after the intense darkness of the previous hours, and enabled him to see whom was his visitor.

The stranger closed the door of the cell, descended the steps, and advanced towards Jack, swinging the lantern to and fro so as to flash the light into every corner of the small room. That squat figure, that ungraceful walk; Jack recognised him at once. Notwithstanding the sombrero, the long cloak, the silence observed by the man, his prisoner at once saluted him by name.

"So this is how you keep your prisoners, Don Hypolito Xuarez?"

Xuarez started at being thus recognised so speedily, but restraining his speech, flashed the lantern up and down Jack's tall figure as he leaned against the wall, and started again.

"Carambo! You are free! The chains——"

"Are there, Señor!"

The rebel leader looked first at the broken chains afterwards at Jack, and seemed to regard his prisoner as a kind of Samson. He had a profound respect for

physical strength, for physical beauty ; and the splendid frame of the young Englishman, in conjunction with this evidence of his muscles, inspired Don Hypolito with great admiration.

“Bueno, Señor Duval !” he said, in the frank tone of a man who cherishes no animosity, “you are a difficult person to deal with. You have broken your chains ! Had I not arrived thus opportunely, you might by this time have broken out of prison.”

“It’s not impossible, Señor,” replied Jack, coolly. “You may be certain I would not have sat down much longer doing nothing. But now——”

“You are thinking of making use of my presence here to facilitate your escape. Is it not so, mi amigo ? If you are wise, do not try. You may knock me down—I am but a dwarf beside you ! You may steal these keys, this lantern ; but you know not the palace, you know not the guards, and, above all, even if you did get free, you could not escape from Acauhtzin. No, mi amigo ! Here you are ! here you stay, unless you agree to my conditions.”

“Conditions !” echoed Jack, scornfully. “I think I can guess what those conditions are, Señor Xuarez.”

“Bueno! Then I can save my breath,” replied Don Hypolito, setting down the lantern. “If you know the conditions of your release, you also know whether to accept them or not! Speak plainly, mi amigo!”

“Don Hypolito,” observed Jack, not answering this question directly, “I do not know whether to regard you as a knave or a fool. You must be the former, else you had not betrayed me and my friends. You are the latter, or you would not ask me to agree to certain conditions which you know are quite impossible—with me?”

“You have the great merit, Señor Duval, of candour. I admire it as a virtue, but it can be carried too far. I do not like being called knave or fool, as I deserve neither name.”

“Is that so? Good! I say you are both! However, I am open to argument; so let me hear your side of the question.”

Don Hypolito laughed quietly, and eyed his rival with increased respect.

“I wish you were on my side, Don Juan. A man such as you would be invaluable to me.”

"I thank you for your good opinion, Señor ; but I am not on your side, neither am I likely to be. I support the established Government of Cholocaca."

"You are a—but no," said Xuarez, checking himself with a sardonic smile ; "we have no time to discuss politics. All are against me now, but when I am seated in the presidential chair, the world will be in my favour. To-day, Señor, I am an adventurer. To-morrow I will be a conqueror. Success is everything in the eyes of the world. However, we need not talk of these things which do not interest you. I notice you have not yet asked after your friends."

"Why should I, Don Hypolito?" replied Jack, determined to show no signs of anxiety in the presence of this man. "I know that my friends are safe, and are at present on their way to Tlatonac."

"It is true, but how did you guess this much Don Juan?"

"From what I know of your character."

"Pardon me, Señor, no one knows my character," said Xuarez, quietly.

“Not your real character, perhaps, but the character by which you choose to be known to the world.”

The nonchalance of the young Englishman somewhat puzzled Xuarez. Here was a man talking quietly with one whom he had every reason to hate and dread. Wounded as he was, incarcerated in a gloomy cell; in doubt as to the safety of his friends, the whereabouts of his sweetheart—Jack had yet sufficient pluck to conceal his real feelings, and play a part which entirely deceived even so acute an observer of human nature as Don Hypolito. He saw that Jack was purposely holding himself back instead of giving way to his righteous indignation, but while admiring the self-restraint of the young man, he was doubtful as to the meaning of such diplomatic conduct.

Experience had taught Don Hypolito that the only way to fathom the feelings of others was to make them talk freely, listen attentively, and draw conclusions from chance observations. This method he now applied to Jack, and asked him to proceed in a grave tone of voice, all the time keeping his ears open to find out the underlying meaning of

this impassive demeanour. He discovered nothing, because there was nothing to discover. Jack spoke truthfully and bluntly, giving voice to his real feelings, and Xuarez, accustomed to double dealing, to double meaning, was for once in his life utterly at fault.

“You have started this war, Señor,” said Jack with painful candour, “entirely for your own ends. The excuse you make is that Gomez has broken the constitution of Cholocaca. This is false, as you know well. However, it is a good excuse upon which to work out your aims. In this war you wish the civilised world to be on your side—to look upon you as a great man, fitted to be the saviour of Cholocaca from a tyrannical Government. To this end you dare not act violently towards any representative nation of the civilised world. England is a representative nation, and you to-day saluted her flag. You respected the ambassadors from the Junta because they were accompanied by Englishmen, because they came here on an English ship. One of those men whom you thus respected is the war correspondent of a London paper, and you wished

him of write home to his journal narrating the courtesy of Don Hypolito Xuarez, and thus interesting our nation's feelings in your favour. The attack made by the mob was, I firmly believe, made without your sanction. You wished the embassy to depart in safety, and they so departed. One man, however, you desired to detain, because he was your rival in the affections of a woman. That man is myself! So you made use of the riot to have me knocked down in the fight, and taken here to prison. Now that you think I am worn out with wounds, thirst, and imprisonment, you come to offer me my liberty on two conditions. First, that I surrender all right to the hand of Doña Dolores. Second, that I leave Cholocaca for ever. These, Señor Xuarez, are your motives in acting as you have done, dictated, as I said before, not, perhaps, by your real character, but by the noble character in which you wish to appear to the world."

Don Hypolito listened to this long speech with rapt attention, and could not help admiring the way in which the young man had fathomed his motives.

When Jack ended, he raised his head and proceeded to lie—uselessly, as it afterwards proved—still he lied.

“In a great measure, what you say is correct, Don Juan. I do wish to stand well with the nations, of Europe, because I believe my cause to be a just one. Gomez was elected President by the aristocrats, not by the people. I believe in democracy. He governs so as to throw the whole power of the state into the hands of those who would take away the liberties of the people, won so gloriously by Zuloaga. You say I have begun this war from a personal ambition. That may be so. I wish to be Dictator—Supreme Dictator of the Republic, and to raise her to her rightful position as a power in the world. These, Señor, are political and personal questions. They need not be discussed. What you say about the embassy is true. Had the boat of Señor Felipe entered the harbour under the opal flag, I would have ordered the fort guns to sink her for such audacity. She however carried the English ensign. I respected that ensign; I received the deputation; I heard the insolent demand of the Junta, and gave my answer. They were free

to depart without hindrance from me. The outbreak of the mob was solely due to the message sent. I did not create the riot. I did not make use of the tumult to get you into my power. But when in the *mêlée* you were stunned, my soldiers carried you off to the *Palacio Nacional*. I saw an opportunity of gaining my ends by thus having you in my power, and so put you in this prison. Now I come to make my terms. Accept them, and you are free. Refuse, and a terrible fate will befall you ! ”

“ To remain in prison here, I suppose ? ” said Jack, contemptuously.

“ No ; worse ! ”

“ What, would you kill me ? ”

“ I will not harm a hair of your head. What your fate will be I refuse to tell you ; but if you are a wise man you will accept my offer of freedom.”

“ And accept your conditions also. The conditions being those I have stated ? ”

“ Precisely ! You have rare penetration, Don Juan ! My conditions are as you have guessed. Give up Doña Dolores ! leave Cholocaca, and you are free.”

“ I refuse.”

"Think well, Señor," said Xuarez, coldly. "I am not a man to threaten in vain. Your fate will be a terrible one."

"I quite believe you capable of any enormity, Don Hypolito," retorted Jack, with a curling lip; "but why waste any more time over the matter? I refuse!"

"On what grounds?"

"On what grounds?" reiterated Jack, in a haughty tone. "Simply that it does not suit my convenience either to give up Doña Dolores or to leave Cholocaca at your bidding."

Xuarez was nettled at Jack's elaborately insulting manner; but he did not lose his temper. He was too clever a man to do that. With a sudden change of front, he took a hint from card-players, and tried to force Jack's hand.

"You love Doña Dolores?"

"That is not a question for you to ask."

"Pardon me, Señor; I also love Doña Dolores, therefore I am interested in your reply."

"Are you?" said Jack, facing his questioner sharply; "then you shall have it. I do love Doña

Dolores; and, what is more, she returns that love. One person only will she marry, and that person is myself, John Duval ! ”

“ You will never marry her ! ” exclaimed Xuarez, vehemently. “ She is mine !—mine ! Before a month is gone, she becomes my wife ! ”

“ Ah ! ” sneered Jack, with a world of meaning in his tone, “ I knew you lied when you said she was not in Acauhtzin. ”

“ Carrai ! ” cried Don Hypolito, who was beginning to lose his temper ; “ I did not lie. She is not in Acauhtzin. She is—— ”

“ Where ? ” asked Duval, impetuously.

“ In a place you will never discover, Señor. Not that it matters much, for, in any case, you will not marry her. No ! You are reserved for a worse fate !—a fate which will bitterly punish you for daring to be my rival. ”

“ I am not a child, to be frightened of big words, ” said Jack, scornfully, though his heart quailed at the deadly menace of the Mestizo’s tones. “ My friends know I am in Acauhtzin. They will come back for me. ”

“ They have already tried to do so, ” retorted

Xuarez, triumphantly. "When they left the harbour, I suppose they discovered you were left behind. The boat returned ; but a few shot from the forts, and the war-ships made her retreat, and when I last saw her she was steaming full speed for Tlatonac."

"Yes? I knew as much. To bring back an army to level Acauhtzin to the ground. To capture you! to rescue me!"

"No one can rescue you!" replied Xuarez, in a sombre tone. "Your only chance of escape is to give up Doña Dolores!"

"To you! to you!" cried Jack, fiercely. "You who love her not for herself, but because she is the guardian of the opal stone! Ah, yes, Señor Xuarez! I know well what you design. You wish to marry Dolores—to secure the opal stone, to gain over the Indians to your cause. All ambition; there is no love. I tell you, Señor, such a thing can never be. Dolores would sooner die than give herself up to a villain like yourself. You will never possess Dolores—you will never be master of the Chalchuih Tlatonac! Turn your ambitions to other things, Don Hypolito. Dolores is not for you!"

Don Hypolito sprang to his feet with a cry of rage. Hitherto he had restrained himself in a most admirable manner ; but now the insulting speeches of his prisoner proved too much for even his well-trained temper. A torrent of passion swept away all his reserve, and he burst out into a furious speech.

“Dolores *is* for me ! She will be mine in another week or so. She is the guardian of the opal, and that also will be mine. When I am possessed of the devil stone, the Indians will flock round my standard. I have the fleet, I have an army, I will have the Indians, too, my allies, guided by the devil stone. That, also, will be mine, and Dolores with it. I will become Dictator of Cholocaca. I will raise her to a pinnacle of power. She will rule the South—nay, the North also. Mexico, Venezuela, Nicaragua, Guatemala, they will all be mine. In the North, the United States ; in the South, the Empire of the Opal, with myself as Ruler. It is a grand——”

“Dream !” interrupted Jack, faintly, for the pain of his wound was telling on his frame. “It is a dream ! a dream !”

“It is no dream ! Or, if a dream, it will soon turn

out a reality. And you—you low-born Englishman, would dare to bar my way to this fame. Lie there, Señor, and wait my commands. You will die, and by a death which will break even your spirit. You will die and be forgotten, while I, Hypolito Xuarez, will reconstruct on this continent the Empire of Montezuma !”

He spoke to deaf ears, for, overcome by fatigue and pain, Duval had fainted. Xuarez bent over him, and held the lantern to his face. It was deadly pale, and the eyes were closed.

“I do not want him to die,” muttered the remorseless Mestizo, going towards the door. “I shall send a doctor to look after his wound. He shall be made whole again, but only to perish in tortures. Not for you, Don Juan, is Dolores ; not for you the opal, but death and dishonour. You fall ! I rise ! My star quenches yours in its burning splendour.”

In another moment he had quitted the prison, leaving his rival stretched out in the darkness, to all appearances lifeless and lost.

CHAPTER V.

IN SHADOWLAND.

Weary body, aching brain,
 Tortured mind, and heavy soul,
 Fourfold being, one existence !
 Life with troublous insistence,
 To ye brings but constant dole,
 Ceaseless weeping, endless pain ;
 Yet is all this sorrow vain
 When the waves of slumber roll
 Over body, over soul.
 In such slumber should ye list, hence
 Flies the spirit to attain
 That far land of dreams and stories,
 Misty realms of airy glories,
 Where the body hath no being,
 Nor the eyes an earthly seeing
 And the mind makes no resistance
 To events which overleap
 Nature's laws, which bind existence ;
 From our sphere the spirit fleeing
 Dwells but in the realm of sleep.

AFTER that extraordinary interview with Don Hypo-
 lito in the prison, Jack ceased to take any interest
 in earthly matters, and went for a space into shadow-

land. He was not dead, but delirious. As a captive balloon is anchored to earth, so Jack's soul had flown into the realms of dream, yet was held to his body by a small amount of life.

Yet curiously enough he retained a dull impression of earthly events. All things actually done to his body coloured his dreams and decided his visions. As the fancies of the sleepers are determined by external actions, so as through a veil the wounded man faintly perceived the every-day life going on around his inert body. Through the chain extending from body to soul which held the latter captive to earth passed the thrills hinting at corporeal-existence, and these dominating his spirituality whirled him hither and thither, according as they happened. We in health feel in slumber the power of the unseen world guiding our every action ; this man, in sickness dwelt, spiritually speaking, in the world of shadows, whereof we have no knowledge, and therefrom felt rather than saw the happening of earthly events which coloured his ghostly being.

Oh those dreams, those visions apocalyptical, what agonies, what ecstasies, what feelings did they not

beget? Now of earth, now of heaven, frequently of hell. Years afterwards, Jack remembering portions of these fantasies, would shudder and turn pale at the mere thought of having endured them. Wild as the visions of Ezekiel, gorgeous as the Arabian Nights, hideous as De Quincey's dreamings, delicate and spiritual as the songs of Aerial, those chimeras, at once terrible and fascinating, racked his spiritual being with the pangs of pleasure and pain. As thus:—

. . . Darkness! the infinite darkness of chaos, before the light-creating word was spoken by the Deity. Ages and ages and ages of gloom, of horror, of thick opacity. No light, no glimmer, no glow to break this all-pervading blackness. No earth beneath, no sky above, nothing but clinging gloom on all sides. So chill, so freezing—surely hell were not more terrible. . . .

Ha! a burst of light penetrating the gloom. The word is spoken, the light is here. . . . Day divides itself from night . . . from the womb of the darkness springs the faint radiance of dawn. Then the sun, the glorious sun, rises like a god to

conquer the foul fiends of shadow. See how his arrows fly, golden and swift, from his never-empty bow . . . east, west, north, south . . . and the glory of light spreads over all creation . . . I am borne along on the wings of a mighty wind blown from the gates of the dawn . . . faster and faster and faster. . . . I swim through the crystalline air . . . I poise myself like a bird in the opaline glories of a whirling sphere. . . . In the heart of the rainbow . . . still no earth . . . but air and the coruscation of infinite colours—red and yellow and green and blue . . . They swirl in circles, they shoot on all sides from a spot of brilliance as the spokes of a wheel . . . They range themselves in lines of ever-changing hues . . . and now I am blown resistlessly onward by that mighty wind. . . .

The sea! gloom once more! I can see nothing but darkness, yet penetrated by faint gleams of light . . . The wash of many waves break on my ears . . . Overhead a sky veiled in clouds, beneath the black breast of ocean, heaving restlessly in white lines of foam . . . I smell the salt brine of the ocean.

. . . The keen wind lashes my face as with a whip.
. . . Ho! yeo, ho! . . . the sailors are at
work . . . Hark! the throb of a heart. Beat! beat!
beat! beat! It is the beating of the propeller blades
now striking the water . . . I am in the engine-room
. . . the pistons slide silently in and out of the
cylinders . . . Now the giant cranks rise and fall
with monotonous motion . . . and yon gleaming
steel shaft, revolving rapidly, turns the screw in the
dark waters without . . . the hiss of escaping
steam . . . the whirling of wheels . . . the
sudden burst of red flame from the furnace . . .
I am carried across the ocean . . . whither?

Earth! at last the land. . . Mother of all
things, I salute thee . . . this bleak beach on
which dash the waves . . . the soft odour of the
wind sways the trees on yonder promontory. . . .
I hear the measured dip of oars . . . the grating
of the boat's keel on the stones. . . . Ha! I am
in the hands of demons . . . their eyes glare as
they lift me from boat to litter. . . . The curtains
are dropped, and I feel the swing and sway of the
litter being carried up steep heights. . . .

This is a primeval forest . . . green as the sea . . . scarcely so restless . . . the warm wind stirs the giant branches . . . what crowded hues . . . and lo! the flash of brilliant flowers . . . the odour of spices . . . Brilliant birds flit from branch to branch like flying gems . . . I hear the singing of choirs invisible . . . the birds! . . . Yes, birds only . . . Garlands of flowers trail from the trees . . . beneath their shadow the grass is crowded with blossoms . . . wherever I step a flower springs to being . . . those pools of still water blue as turquoise . . . the Indian conjurer! . . . I see him hiding amid the frondage . . . look! . . . the saurian! . . . Oh, the frightful monster. . . . Preadamite! . . . begotten in chaos slime . . . Trees! trees! trees without end . . . The earth is one vast forest, and I alone wander therein. . . .

Snow! . . . a vast expanse of snow . . . for miles and leagues. . . . No! it is salt lying in thin flakes on the brown earth . . . the surface glitters in the moonlight as if it were ice . . . Far and wide whirl thin white pillars of salt in the

grip of the wind. . . . Lot's wife! Ha! Ha!
 Nay, no woman do I see, but salt on all hands . . .
 like snow . . . and moon freezing crystals. . . .

The forest again . . . more trees . . .
 birds . . . odours. . . . Hark! a song
 . . . 'tis the dancing-girls who sing . . . I
 heard them call . . . I see them shake their
 anklets of gold . . . the cymbals crash . . .
 the trinkets shine. Can you not hear the roll of the
 serpent-skin drums? . . .

Oh, this interminable avenue of stone gods . . .
 on either side the faces of solemn sphinxes. . . .
 I am in Egypt . . . I go up to offer sacrifice to
 the god Thoth . . . lines of sphinxes . . .
 statues of kings with their hands placed on their
 knees . . . then this great flight of steps . . .
 Up, and up and up . . . Are we going to heaven?
 . . . I will bow down to my God . . .
 Horror! Huitzilopochtli . . . This is not my
 God . . . I sacrifice to Thoth . . . To Isis
 . . . Ah, you would make of me the victim . . .
 Oh, foul priest, knife in hand . . . the stone of
 the sacrifice . . . you raise the obsidian knife

. . . Again the chant of the priests . . . the
light clash of the dancing-girls' anklets . . .
drums . . . cymbals and death. . . .

I am in the tomb . . . yes; fold my hands on
my breast, for I have done with life . . . straight
and white I lie, with cerements swathing my form . .
this is a king's tomb . . . these walls are painted
with many colours . . . yonder are gods and
kings and heroes walking in long files . . . here
they sacrifice to their god . . . there they lead
captive trains of prisoners. . . . A splendid tomb,
but the roof crushes me down . . . oh, Heaven!
can those pillars, those caryatides support the cyclo-
pean architecture? . . . It will fall and crush me,
like Samson. . . . Yes, I thirst! I am dead, but
I thirst. . . . Dives in hell . . . give me. . . .

. . . What! a woman's face? . . . I have
seen that face before . . . those dark eyes, that
smiling mouth . . . it is thou! Dolores! Oh,
my heart's best love, I again find you,—in the
tomb? . . . we have done with life . . . then we
were divided; but Death, more merciful, has joined
us again. . . . Place your cool white hand on my

brow . . . it burns . . . it burns. . . .
 No, no! do not leave me . . . oh, I see you fade
 in the darkness like a vision . . . and this phan-
 tom which rises between us? . . . Oh, Xuarez!
 liar! thief! murderer! . . . thus do I slay thee!
 . . . So weak; so weary; I know nothing . . .
 where am I? . . . what am I? . . . whither
 have my visions fled? . . . I am dead! not in
 hell, nor heaven . . . but where? I know not
 . . . I am dead . . . you, Dolores . . .
 you, Xuarez . . . you all, dreams . . . I lie
 here dead and still . . . in my ear the chant of a
 slave. . . . Could I only turn my head . . .
 ah! the slave rises . . . he bends over me . . .
 Cocom! . . .

“Yes, Señor, it is Cocom,” said a well-known voice,
 as a gentle hand skilfully adjusted the bandages.

“Cocom!” repeated Jack, in a weak voice. “Am I
 dead? Do I dream? Am I dead?”

“No, Señor Juan. You were nearly dead, and for
 days you have dreamed of many things. Now you
 are better, and will live.”

“Still on earth?”

"Yes, Don Juan. Still do you live, thanks be to the gods. Teoyamiqui has not yet brought you to her kingdom. Now, lie you still, Señor. So! Drink this, and speak not ; you are so weak."

Jack raised his head from the pillow, and greedily drank the contents of the cup held to his lips by Cocom. Then he closed his eyes, and fell into a refreshing sleep, while the old Indian sat quietly by the side of the couch, muttering some strange old song of a forgotten civilisation. Now and then a form would glide into the room and look at Jack sleeping in the bed, so still, so deathlike. Sometimes a man, more often a woman, and ever beside the couch sat the stolid Cocom, watching the face of his patient with intense interest.

How long he slept thus Jack did not know, but when he woke from a refreshing slumber all his delirium had departed. He felt weak, truly, but clear-headed and calm in his mind. Opening his eyes, he listened vaguely to the murmuring song of his attendant, and thought over the events which had preceded his illness. The entry into Acauhtzin ; the dismissal of the deputation at the Palacio Nacional ; the fight

at the sea-gate ; the interview in prison with Don Hypolito ; and then utter blankness. He remembered fainting in the cell at Acauhtzin, and now he had wakened—where ? With an effort he raised his head and looked round him.

In his delirium he had thought he was in a tomb, and truly the room wherein he now found himself was not unlike one of those strange Egyptian sepulchres, houses of the dead, wherein the highest art of that sombre civilisation was displayed. This low roof, formed of Titanic masses of stone ; these heavy walls, gaudy with mural paintings, representing gods, kings, heroes strange sacrifices, and mystical ceremonies ; all were redolent of the land of the Nile. Through a narrow slit in the wall filtered a pale light ; skins of jaguar and puma carpeted the stone floor ; rich coverlets of featherwork lay over the couch, and the entrance was draped with gaudy tapestries, dyed with confused tints, hinting at barbaric art. Jack, for the moment, thought he was indeed in Egypt, when, suddenly, at the side of the room he saw the hideous image of Huitzilopochtli, and heard the monotonous chant of his watcher. Then, his true situation came

vividly to his mind ; this was a room in some Indian dwelling, yonder was the fierce god of the Aztecs, and by his bedside knelt Cocom.

"Where am I?" asked the young man, raising himself on his elbow, and looking at the Indian with a puzzled expression of countenance.

"In good hands, Señor," was the evasive answer.

"Yes, yes! I know that. But am I still in Acauhtzin?"

"No. You are many miles from Acauhtzin."

"But I was there last night."

Cocom shook his head, and, producing a cigarette, lighted it carefully, blew some smoke through his nostrils, and looked steadily at Jack with his melancholy eyes.

"You were there five days ago, Señor."

"What do you mean, Cocom?"

"Ah! the Señor forgets that he has been ill. For five days he has been in the land of everlasting darkness. Cocom has watched many hours by this couch and listened to the crying of the Señor. You have seen visions and heard voices, Don Juan. On the borders of Teoyamiqui's land have you been, yet not

within her kingdom. But Cocom knows many things, and by his art has cheated the goddess of one Americano. You are out of danger now, Señor, and I, Cocom, have cured you."

"Mucha gracias!" murmured Jack, patting the Indian on the shoulder with a weak hand; "but tell me where I am now."

"Where does your memory fail, Don Juan?"

Jack passed his hand across his brow. The confusion of his brain had departed. His senses were clear now, and he could recall everything up to a certain point.

"I remember the embassy from Tlatonac to Acauhtzin—the fight at the sea-gate. There I was struck down, and recovered my senses in prison. With Don Hypolito I held a long conversation, and, I suppose, fainted with his voice still in my ears. I wake here at a place you tell me is far from Acauhtzin, and find you by my side—you, Cocom, whom I supposed to be at Tlatonac!"

"Listen, Don Juan," said Cocom, with great deliberation. "I will tell you many things that have taken place since your soul was in the realm

of shadows. When you became insensible at Acauhtzin, a doctor was sent to attend to you by Don Hypolito. That doctor did what he could for you, but thought you would die as your soul was not within your body. Wildly did you cry, Don Juan, and many strange things did you say. Then, by the order of Don Hypolito, you were carried away on board a war-ship down the coast. At a certain point your body was taken ashore in a boat, and there delivered to certain people, who expected your coming. Having been placed on a litter, you were carried through the forest, across the salt desert, and again through the forest till you were placed on that bed. For two days have you tossed and turned, and cried, and fought. But now you are well, Don Juan—you will live; thanks be to the gods."

Jack listened to all this as in a dream. The explanation fitted in with those vague visions which had haunted his delirious brain. The darkness—that was the cell at Acauhtzin; the light came when he was carried on board the war-ship. Then the sea-vision, the landing on the coast—that mirage

of a tropical forest—the snowy plains of salt, and the climbing of many steps up to an antique temple. A sudden thrill shot through his enfeebled frame as he recalled the vision of the sacrifice, he recollected Cocom's last words referring to the gods, he glanced terrified at the frightful image of Huitzilopochtli, and turning slowly towards the Indian, repeated his often-asked question, the answer to which he already guessed.

“What is this place?”

Cocom arose to his feet, drew himself up to his full height, and pointed majestically towards the idol.

“The temple of Huitzilopochtli! The shrine of the Chalchuih Tlatonac.”

“God!” cried Jack, in despair, as he recognised his position. “I am lost!”

He saw his peril at a glance. The threats of Don Hypolito regarding a frightful death were not mere words. With devilish ingenuity he had secured the death of his rival, with no possible chance of the truth becoming known. Jack saw that Xuarez had preserved his life, had delivered him to the Indians, to the end that he might be offered up

on the altar of the war-god, as a sacrifice to the opal. No wonder his usually brave heart quailed at the prospect of such horrors. Captive to remorseless savages, in the heart of an impenetrable forest, there was no chance of a rescue by his friends. He was weak, unarmed, unfriended, in the power of a fanatic race ; there was no help for it—he must die.

“Cocom,” whispered Jack, clutching the Indian’s arm, “why have I been brought here—why did Don Hypolito deliver me to the Indians? Is it for —for——”

His dry lips refused to form the horrible word ; but Cocom, without the least emotion, supplied it.

“For sacrifice ! Yes, Don Juan ; you are to be offered to the god.”

“Horrible ! When ?”

“In three weeks. At the termination of the great cycle.”

“What do you mean ?” asked Jack, with a shudder.

“Our time,” explained Cocom, with stolid apathy, “is divided into cycles of fifty-two years. This have

we received from our Aztec ancestors. At the end of a cycle the sun will die out in the heavens, and the earth end, if the new fire is not lighted on the altars of the gods. When the last day of the cycle comes, you, Don Juan, will be bound on the stone of sacrifice, your heart will be taken out as an offering to the great gods, and on your breast will the new fire be lighted. Then will the sun rise again, and a new cycle begin for the earth. The gods will be appeased, and mankind will be saved."

Jack had read of this terrible superstition in the fascinating pages of Prescott, but he never expected that he would one day take an active part in such a ceremony. With the hope of despair he endeavoured to evade his doom.

"But the body of a white man will not please the gods. Why not sacrifice as your ancestors did, on the Hill of the Star?"

"Hitherto, Señor, that has been done. Now, however, the gods have spoken through the opal, and it is willed that a white man alone can avert the end of time. A white man must be sacrificed, and you are chosen."

Jack shuddered, and hid his face in his hands.

"Surely, Señor, you are not afraid!"

"Afraid!" echoed Jack, uncovering his face, with a frown. "No, Cocom; an Englishman is never afraid of death. But to come in such a form as this—oh, horrible! horrible!"

Cocom could not understand this alarm. Like all Indians, he regarded death with stoical resignation, and would have been perfectly willing himself to have been offered on the altar of sacrifice, seeing such a death would admit him at once into the Paradise of the sun. But he was very old, and therefore useless. The gods demanded a man, handsome, young, in the flower of his age, and therefore was it certain that Jack would be acceptable to the bloodthirsty Huitzilopochtli.

"Did Don Hypolito know this when he delivered me to your friends?"

"It was for that purpose he delivered you, Señor."

"Oh, fiend! devil!" cried Jack, trying to rise in his bed. "I wish I had my fingers round his throat!"

"Lie quiet, Señor," said Cocom, forcing him back. "You will make yourself ill again."

"Why should I not, seeing I am only reserved for this frightful death?"

"That is as it may be, Señor," observed Cocom, significantly.

"What do you mean?" asked Duval, with sudden hope.

"Hush!" replied the old man, laying his finger on his lips, and glancing apprehensively around. "In this temple the very walls have ears."

"You can save me?"

"Perhaps. I know not."

"But——"

Cocom bent over Jack on the pretence of arranging the bed-clothes, and brought his lips close to the young man's ear.

"Say not a word, Señor. If the priests suspect me, you are lost. I come hither as my fathers came before me, but I worship not the devil-stone. I am a true Catholic, Señor. The priests wanted a victim, and asked me to betray to them Don Pedro, when he was with me beyond the walls. Then I refused, and said I could not do so. The end of the cycle approaches, and the priests were alarmed, so they sent to Don

Hypolito, and promised to make all the Indians help him in his war, if he procured them a white man for a victim to the gods. Don Hypolito promised, and two days ago sent you."

"The fiends!"

"Hush! I am a medicine-man, placed here by the priests to cure you; but they think I wish to see you sacrificed. I do not. I will save you."

"Oh, Cocom, I thank you."

"Are you mad, Señor?" whispered the Indian, thrusting him hurriedly back; "eyes may be on us now. The walls of this room are pierced with secret eye-places."

Jack recognised the wisdom of this reasoning, and sank back on his couch. It was just as well he did so, for at that very moment the drapery of the door was swept aside, and a man entered the room.

He was a majestic-looking personage, much taller than the average Indian. Indeed, he was as huge as Tim himself, but not so bulky. He wore a long white robe, falling to his feet, over this a mantle of gaudy leather-work. On his head was set a fresh chaplet of flowers, on his breast burned the red glim-

mer of a small opal. Advancing into the middle of the room, he swung a small incense-burner before Jack, throwing therein some odoriferous gum, which made a thick, perfumed smoke. After this, he cast some flowers on the couch, and muttered a few words with uplifted hands, finally ending the ceremony by falling on his knees.

"What does this mean?" asked Jack of Cocom, who stood reverently on one side, observing all this mummary.

"Hush, Señor ! He adores you as a god."

"Devil take him and his worship," muttered Jack, crossly, in English. Then the priest spoke in the Indian tongue, and Cocom translated his speech to Jack.

"Is my lord better in health?" asked the priest.

"Tell him I am ; but I don't care about being preserved for sacrifice."

"Speak not so, Don Juan," said Cocom, in Spanish, with a look of alarm ; "you are not supposed to know anything of that. I told you on the peril of my life."

"Then tell him whatever lies you please !" said Duval, viciously, and, rolling over, turned his back on the priest.

"A bad sign!" murmured the priest, looking anxiously at Cocom. "Is my lord angered?"

"Nay," replied Cocom, in the Indian tongue; "my lord is much improved in health, oh, Ixtlilxochitl; but as with all who are ill at ease, he is fretful and wanting in courtesy."

"It is true," replied Ixtlilxochitl, reverently. "The sick are ever foolish. See that thou make him strong, Cocom, for the gods accept naught but blooming health."

"Oh, my sacred lord; he will be cured in two days from now. Cocom knows of magic herbs whereby the favourite of Huitzilopochtli can be made whole. Let Ixtlilxochitl be content, my lord will be pure and strong for the sacrifice."

"It is well," said the priest, rising from his knees. "I will leave my lord to his sleep; but will he not vouchsafe one glance at his servant?"

Instructed by Cocom, Jack was forced to turn round and smile at the priest, who knelt down to receive this mark of favour. Then he adored Jack with more incense and flowers, after which he withdrew with reverent genuflections.

"The old fiend!" muttered Jack, when the drapery had again veiled the door. "I should like to have sent a boot at his head."

"Hush, my lord Juan."

"Carrai! why should I? That devil-monkey does not understand Spanish."

"No, Señor. Still, it is wiser to risk nothing."

"You are quite right, Cocom. I place myself entirely in your hands. Save me, and I promise you I shall not forget you."

"Cocom will save you, for the sake of Don Miguel," said the old man, proudly; "and for the sake of the lady Dolores."

"Dolores!" repeated Jack, eagerly. "Do you know where she is?"

"I know nothing at present," replied Cocom, with a meaning glance. "Possess your soul in patience, Don Juan; all will yet be well. Don Hypolito desires to kill you, and wed Doña Dolores. He shall do neither. Santissima Virgen, I swear it. Be silent! No words, my lord. Rest now, and sleep. You will need all your strength."

"For the sacrifice?"

"Nay, Señor, for escape!"

CHAPTER VI.

THE SHRINE OF THE OPAL.

Lord of the humming-bird's foot !

Behold thy worshippers rising and falling in adoration before thee, as
rise and fall the restless waves of the far-reaching ocean.

These thousands gathered from the ends of the earth, are thine, and
thine only.

We see thine image bedecked with jewels, shine like the sun at his
rising

Before thee, the stone, whereon the favoured one yields up his life for
thy glory.

Smoking hearts dost thou love, the savour of blood, the carnage of
battle.

For thou art god of war, death alone is the way to thy favour.

Spins before thee that precious stone by which thou tellest thy wishes,
That shining, precious stone, which now burns red as the blood of
thine altars,

Crimson it gleams, hinting war ! War is the fate of the future !

Oh, mighty one ! Lord of the humming-bird's foot ! We pray thee
give order,

That the red war light melt soon to the azure of peace,

Then will fresh victims be thine, and happiness ours,

Shout, ye people ! ask peace from the lord of the humming-bird's foot.

IN two days, Jack was comparatively well, and able
to move about without much trouble. This almost

miraculous cure was effected by Cocom through the medium of some medicinal herbs, the curative powers of which were known to him alone. Out of these he made two decoctions, one for internal, the other for external application. With the latter he bathed the wound on Jack's head, and made him drink quantities of the former every two hours. The effect was wonderfully rapid, and Jack soon found himself gaining strength. In the hands of a European doctor, he would probably have been laid up for weeks ; but the rude medicine of the Indian set him on his legs in no time. The wound on his head gave him no trouble, and healed with great quickness ; a fact which Jack put down as much to his healthy blood, and simple living, as to Cocom's physicing.

With renewed health and strength came a stronger desire to escape from the horrible fate which waited him in a few weeks. When he went out, however, and explored the strange city, in the centre of which stood the shrine of the opal, Jack saw plainly that it would be madness to attempt flight without the assistance of Cocom. The Indians apparently knew this, for, treated by them more as a guest than

a prisoner, he was permitted to wander freely round the neighbourhood. Still, did he venture too far in the direction of the belt of timber surrounding the city, he was always followed by two or more native guards ; these, when he once more returned to the city, quietly left him. From this espionage he plainly saw that his roaming was restricted, but not in such a measure as to cause him any unpleasant feeling.

As regards the behaviour of the Indians, Jack had nothing to complain of. Indeed, they could scarcely have been more deferential. Regarded as a kind of deity, his appearance was the signal for the most slavish adulation. The Indians, of whom there were a goodly number in the vicinity, threw themselves on their faces before him, as he walked abroad, attended by Cocom. If he seated himself, they strewed flowers at his feet, and swung censers, fragrant with copal, until he was almost hidden by white wreaths of perfumed smoke. This popularity was not unpleasant ; but, as Jack knew it was but a prelude to the sacrificial stone, he was anything but gratified at thus being continually reminded of the dangerous position in which he stood.

On recovering his health, Jack found Cocom much more reticent than when he was acting as doctor. Several times had he been on the point of making some important communication, but always stopped short and refused to speak further. Jack supposed this caution was on account of the priests, who, despite the deference of their demeanour, kept a close watch on his actions, and on those of Cocom. The high priest, Ixtlilxochitl, was a mild-looking old man, who treated Jack in a most courteous manner, and frequently expressed his pleasure that the white lord had so soon recovered his health. Such inquiries would have been much more acceptable had not the recipient known that they were but the outcome of Ixtlilxochitl's desire that he should be in good condition for the sacrifice. It was no pleasant thing for Duval to know that these courtesies came from an old gentleman who was anxiously looking forward to taking his life.

Under these circumstances, Jack did not wonder that Cocom was cautious, and though for the moment the attitude of the old Indian appeared anything but friendly, Jack quite relied on him to aid his escape.

He was anxious to escape from this buried city, where he was threatened with so terrible a fate; he was long-
ing to return to Tlatonac for the purpose of reassuring his friends, who he knew would be terribly put out by his disappearance at Acauhtzin; and, above all, he was anxious to be free so as to search for Dolores.

In Jack's opinion she was at Acauhtzin, as a man so vile as Don Hypolito could no longer be believed. If she was not in the power of the rebel leader, she would have been with the Indians. Yet here was Jack in the very heart of this aboriginal civilisation, in the stronghold of the opal, yet he neither saw her nor heard anything of her. He questioned Cocom, but that wily old man replied that he knew nothing, and as Don Hypolito had admitted that he knew where she was, Jack felt sure that the poor girl was held a prisoner by the Mestizo at Acauhtzin. He was therefore anxious to escape, and get back to Tlatonac, for the purpose of urging on the war with all possible speed, so that the northern capital should be invested within a reasonable time, and Dolores rescued from her terrible position. Consequently, escape was his one aim; but he saw plainly that

without assistance it would be impossible to leave this city of the opal, buried as it was in the savage solitudes of primeval forests.

That this famous opal shrine was in Cholocaca he knew perfectly well, but as he had been brought hither in an unconscious state, he was quite at a loss to lay his finger on the precise locality. Cholocaca, east to west, was two hundred miles from mountains to sea, so the city of the opal could not be situated out of this radius. It might be fifty, a hundred, a hundred and fifty miles from the sea, and Jack, knowing by his pocket-compass in which direction to go, calculated that if he marched due east he could not fail to reach the coast. Once there, and he could soon pick up a canoe or some light boat, in which he could get in due time to Tlatonac.

But to start for the coast without knowing the geography of the country was sheer madness, and Jack stamped his foot with rage as he thought of the miles of trackless forest which lay between him and freedom. To push one's way through a virgin forest is difficult in any case, but to make the attempt without arms, companions, food, and guides was quite an impossi-

bility. That there was some secret way to the coast was plain, as the Indians came hither to this shrine from Tlatonac ; but that way was known only to the priests. Within a certain distance, every new-comer was blinded with a bandage, and this was taken off in the square, before the principal teocalli. The worshippers were conducted into the forests with the same precautions; so, unless he could bribe a priest to show him the secret way, Jack foresaw absolutely no chance of gaining his freedom.

It was a buried city, but not a ruined city, for here the aboriginal civilisation flourished greatly, as it had done before the coming of the Spaniards, to Anahuac. Situated in a hollow cup, on all sides arose verdant forests of bright green, clothing the base of great mountains, which showed their serrated peaks above the vegetation. On three sides the city was shut in by these giant barriers, but towards the west opened a rugged cañon, through which flowed a noisy stream. A road ran along the west side of this freak of nature, cut out of the solid rock, so narrow as to allow only three men to walk abreast. Above and below were the cliffs, thousands of feet in height and depth. No foe

could enter the city by that pass, which led into the great mountains of the interior continent ; but no foe would wish to enter, for this city was holy ground, the Mecca of the aborigines, and had preserved its inviolability from an invasion for centuries.

"It was built by the Toltecs, Señor," said Cocom, who acted as Jack's cicerone. "Ages ago, you must know, this race came hither from the North. It was they who built the great cities of Yucatan in the dark past. Uxmal, Aké, Chichen-Itza. They reared them all. A glorious race were my ancestors, Señor."

"But you are not a descendant of the Toltecs, Cocom?"

"No, Señor, I am a Maya. My ancestors ruled at Mayapan. See," added the Indian, plucking a yellow flower sprouting out from a crevice close at hand, "this is the plant Cocom—my name, Señor, and that of the great kings who ruled Yucatan. The Mayas also built great cities, but Toltecs or Mayas, Don Juan, what does it matter? I am a poor Indian crushed under the heel of the white man."

"You say the Toltecs built this city also?"

"Surely, Don Juan. They came and they went; no

one knows whither they went. We are born, Señor, but we know not from whence we come. We die, but we know not whither we go. So with the Toltecs. They came, they went, and we know nothing more. But they left their cities behind them, Señor, to show how great they were. In their wanderings—I speak from the traditions of the priests—in their wanderings, Señor, they came to this place, through yonder cañon—up the gorge, I think, for then there was no river, no road. Here they lost their leader, and built this city to commemorate his greatness. It is so called after him—Totatzine.”

“Oh, that was his name, no doubt.”

“Quien sabe! No; I do not know what his name was. Totatzine is a Nahuatl word, meaning ‘Our Great Father.’ He was their father and leader, so they called this place Totatzine. It is a monument to his memory.”

“It is a holy city!”

“For ages, Señor, it has been sacred,” replied Cocom, seriously. “Here it was that the god Tezcatlipoca had his shrine, but when the guardians of the opal stone fled hither, the worship of the Chalchuih

Tlatonac became the great religion here. Now the soul of the universe is forgotten, and Huitzilopochtli alone is adored with his devil-stone."

"Who is the soul of the universe?"

"Tezcatlipoca! It is strange, Señor, that the name of this god means 'the shining mirror,' while the Chalchuih Tlatonac means 'the shining precious stone,' so you see the religion has changed but little."

"Do you not adore the old gods, Cocom?"

The Indian looked fearfully around, as though he deemed his answer, though delivered in Spanish, would be overheard and understood by some lurking priest.

"No, Señor Juan," he whispered at length. "I believe the opal can prophesy because it is inhabited by devils, as we are told by the good Padre, but I worship the Holy One and His virgin mother. I am a Catholic, Señor, but once I was an adorer of Huitzilopochtli, and it is hard to break away, Señor, from the habits of youth. I came then—I come now, and though I am looked upon as one devoted to the old gods, yet do I follow the faith of the good Padre!"

"I am glad of that, Cocom. Otherwise you would not help me to escape."

"True. The Holy Virgin has you in her care, Don Juan. I am, assuredly, the only Catholic here in this city of the devil-stone, and I am your friend. You will I aid to escape."

"When?"

"Hush! my lord. Behold, Ixtlilxochitli is at hand."

The suave priest passed them slowly, and bent his head with abject deference as Jack looked at him. He made as though he would have stopped, but Duval waved his hand to intimate that he did not wish to be disturbed. Ixtlilxochitli made a second genuflection, and resumed his way. It was wonderful to see how these bloodthirsty idolators obeyed the slightest wish of their proposed victim.

"He thinks we are plotting," hinted Jack, looking after the old man with anything but an amiable expression.

"No. He trusts me too much. Besides, he would not care if he did guess we were plotting, Señor, thinking, as he does, that I know not the secret way."

"And you do know it?"

Cocom looked around and saw nobody. Then he turned towards Jack, and nodded significantly.

"Yes, Señor, I do know it."

"Bueno! And when——?"

"Another time, Don Juan. We have already spoken too long. Let us resume our examination of the sacred city. It is not wise to be incautious. Folly is loud of speech, but Wisdom is silent."

Jack acquiesced in this view of the matter, and they walked on. He was greatly interested in all he saw around him, as it is not given to everyone to view a great aboriginal civilisation in its full glory. But for the horrible fear he had of failing to escape, and thus run the risk of being sacrificed to the war-god, he would have been quite fascinated by this extraordinary place. Always a bit of an archæologist, he viewed with enthusiasm these giant palaces, these massive temples—works of a great race, still as fresh under the blue tropic sky of to-day as when they were first reared in the dim past. When Europe was a land of savages, this city was built; it rose in its splendour while

Greece was in her glory and Rome was not. Back, many ages back before Christ ; before David, perchance before Abraham, these superb edifices rested majestically in this smiling valley. Still were they inhabited, still were they the home of a race, of a religion—the seat of a barbaric civilisation, the oracle of a faith, as they had been in their pristine glory. The empire of Montezuma had fallen in Mexico, the Incas were now but a name in Peru, gone were the Toltecs, scattered the Mayas, yet the buried city of Totatzine, safe in the midst of primeval forests, endured still, and would endure until that fatal day, which would surely come, when the aboriginal race would silently retreat before the conquering forces of civilisation. Here was the last stronghold of the old gods, driven from the table-lands of Anahuac ; here smoked anew those altars overturned by the Conquistadores ; here shrieked the victim on the terrible stone of sacrifice ; and here was the shrine of the famous Opal, the Chalchuih Tlatonac, the very mention of which thrilled the hearts of all far and wide with superstitious dread.

The sacred city was admirably situated for all purposes. Nothing could be more beautiful than this majestic work of man, set like a jewel within the green circle of the forest-clad mountains. Its health was assured by its being fortunately placed in the genial climate of the Tiera Templada. A vast wall built across the huge rift of the cañon protected it from foes in the west, and the peaks, the impenetrable forests, formed a barrier against the outside world on all other sides. Its inviolability depended upon its remaining hidden in the shadow of the forests; and in this isolated valley none would guess the secret of its existence. It was veritably a buried city, secluded from the prying gaze of mankind, and was probably the only one of its kind in the world. Beautiful, healthy, well defended, closely hidden, this strange town was the pride of the barbaric tribes of Central America—their Mecca, their Jerusalem; the altar of their ancient faith, the city of the shining precious stone. This was the true city of the opal, and not Tlatonac, for here in the central shrine flashed the great gem on the altar of the war-god. The paths of

all savage men converged to this place, and from here welled forth the influence of the old gods which frustrated the efforts of the Padres to Christianise the tribes of Central America.

Down the eastern peaks fell a mighty torrent, which swept irresistibly across the flat plain, and emerged from the valley through the cañon on the west. On either side of this stream was the city built, and three bridges of massive stone connected the one town with the other. That on the right bank of the stream was the city of the priests, while to the left lay the city of commerce, of dwellings, of daily life. In the sacerdotal town a large square surrounded the vast mound whereon was built the teocalli of the Chalchuih Tlatonac, and from this square streets radiated—to the stream, to the mountains, to the wall, like the spokes of a vast wheel. A similar square, with radiating streets, formed the plan of the other town, save that the palace of the Cacique occupied the place of the teocalli. Both towns were crowded with Indians, but the sacerdotal portion was principally filled with pilgrims, come to worship at the shrine of the opal, while the settled population

lived on the other side of the stream. There were large caravanseries round the teocalli, for the accommodation of the visitors who came from all parts of Central America ; and Totatzine derived its wealth, its splendour, its very existence, from the constant crowds pouring in through the secret way to worship the old gods. The entrance to that way was supposed to be in the shrine itself, but none knew the exact place save the priests of Huitzilopochtli, and these jealously preserved the secret on which depended their power.

Accompanied by the faithful Cocom, who, notwithstanding his advanced age, could bear a great deal of fatigue, Jack explored the two cities, meeting everywhere with the greatest deference from the populace. Unpleasant as was his position, he almost forgot his peril, in contemplating the wonderful buildings around him. The architecture of the houses was similar to that of ancient Egypt. Long ranges of squat pillars, decorated with vivid hues, mural paintings, religious and warlike in character, massive walls of reddish stone, sloping inward as they gained height, colossal flights of steps leading up to cyclopean door-

ways, and everywhere the grotesque images of the Aztec gods.

From the flat roofs of the houses arose truncated towers, carved rudely with all the hideous forms of an obscure mythology. From these one could see the vast expanse of the city, the interminable lines of the terraces falling one below the other to the narrow streets, the great squares crowded with people, dominated by *teocalli*, by palace, and far off the sombre length of the wall stretching across the cañon, while beyond this barrier the winding cliffs of the gulch shut out all view of the world beyond. All was vague, awesome, terrible ; the city wore a menacing aspect, even in the cheerful sunlight, and the confused murmur rising upward from the streets, seemed like the lamentations of countless victims, the moaning of countless generations, tortured, terrified, blinded by the blood-stained deities of Anahuac.

"If the Señor so pleases, we will go to the *teocalli*," said Cocom, after they had quite exhausted the commercial portion of the city, "and there behold the opal."

"I should like to see it, above all things," replied

Jack, remembering his first glimpse of the gem ; “ but I thought the priests would not let me enter the temple.”

“ You can go anywhere, Don Juan. Remember, in the eyes of the priests, of the people, you are a deity.”

“ A poor deity, seeing I am but preserved for that cursed altar. Where will they kill me, Cocom—that is, if they get the chance ? ”

“ On the sacrificial stone in front of the teocalli. Your heart will be taken out, and then, when the sacred fire is kindled, your body will be hurled down the steps of the pyramid.”

“ A very pleasant little programme,” said Duval, grimly ; “ it is a pity it should not be carried out ; but as I propose to run away I guess it will be Hamlet with the Dane left out. Bueno, Cocom ! let us view the shambles.”

The Indian assented, and, having crossed over the bridge, they walked up the straight, narrow street which led to the central square. Such people as they passed immediately prostrated themselves on the ground, and in some cases suffered Jack to walk over

them. The young engineer felt inclined to kick them so enraged did he feel at being thus perpetually reminded of his probable fate ; but as such conduct would scarcely be politic, he managed, though with difficulty, to restrain himself.

Soon they emerged from the street between two colossal carved idols of appalling ugliness, and the square lay open before them. Like a vast mountain arose the huge mound with five successive stages, and up to the truncated summit, from the base, stretched a broad flight of sixty steps. Wide and shallow was this staircase, with huge stone masks scowling on each step. These dæmonic countenances were crowned with twisted serpents, and had protruding tongues symbolical of life and light.

"Look like pantomime ogres," thought the irreverent Jack, contemplating these horrors. "I say, Cocom," he said in Spanish, "what are these heads meant to represent?"

"They are god stars throwing their light over the earth, Señor. The projecting tongues represent them doing so."

"Bueno ! I never should have thought putting

out one's tongue meant such a lot. Come, Cocom, let us ascend the steps."

"One moment, Don Juan!" said Cocom, in a low voice, as Jack put his foot on the lower step, "I have a reason for taking you up here."

"To see the opal?"

"Yes; and to see something else. Connected with your escape, Señor. We can talk freely in the teocalli; for now it is noon, and no priest is in the temple."

"Good! We will have it all to ourselves. But I wonder at them leaving the opal unguarded."

"Santissima! It is quite safe, Don Juan! No one would steal the opal. Even if anyone did he could not get out of the town, and if he did get out of the town he would be killed before he reached the coast."

"I see! Superstition is a greater safeguard than bolts or bars."

"Promise me, Señor, you will not cry out at that which I am going to show you," said the Indian, disregarding Jack's remark.

"I don't know what you are going to show me, but I promise you I'll keep silent."

"Bueno, Señor Juan! Let us go!"

He ascended the steps slowly, followed by Jack, who was much puzzled to know the reason of this warning. Cocom, however, had proved himself to be a true friend, so Duval trusted him implicitly, and was quite satisfied that the Indian did not speak without cause. Up those interminable steps they went, till Jack thought they would never reach the summit, and, being still weak from illness, had to pause three or four times during the ascent. At last they arrived at the top, and Cocom, making Jack sit down to rest himself, went into the temple. During the absence of the old man, his patient amused himself in examining the teocalli, and admiring the splendid view outspread before him.

Far below he could see the dual city like a map, intersected by the stream which cut it clean in two. The streets, running at right angles, made it look like a chess-board, and on both sides of the river were the great gaps of the squares. The surrounding green of the forests, the grey worn peaks sharply defined against the blue sky, the reddish-coloured city in the hollow, all made up an inexpressibly beautiful picture. He could see the figures of men, women, and animals

moving like ants through the squares, bright-coloured dots of crawling life. To his ear came the hoarse roar of the river dashing on its rocky bed, the confused hum of voices, the faint cries of merchants, the thin songs of women seated on the distant flat roofs. Hither ascended the mingled murmur, as though the busy city exhaled a huge sigh of sorrow and fear in the ear of their god, whose burdens were so heavy upon them.

Then he turned to view the teocalli, which he found not unworthy of his regard. Indeed, the whole pyramid aroused his admiration. This vast mound of earth, faced with a coating of adobe and covered with silvery cement, was a feat of engineering which at the first sight appeared somewhat startling, seeing it was the work of a barbaric race. Jack was a civil engineer, and learned in mechanics; but it puzzled him to think how this great mass had been built up. What armies of men must have been employed in its construction! What architectural skill was needed! How completely were the four sides covered with the smooth cement! This mound, a mere mole-hill compared with the great artificial hills of Quemada,

Cholula, or Palanque, was as marvellous a work of man as the pyramids of Egypt, and as mysterious.

The teocalli itself was a structure of red stone, consisting of two truncated towers, joined together by a flat-roofed building, in the centre of which was a wide low doorway, the sides of which inclined inward till they nearly touched at the lintel. The whole of this façade was elaborately carved with convoluted serpents, mastodon heads, and frequently bizarre emblems intermingled with representations of the moon and stars. Birds, fishes, bows, arrows, and blazing suns were also carved with wonderful skill out of this dull-hued stone, and directly over the door itself flamed a painted opal, darting rays of divers hues. As all these arabesques were gaudily coloured, the effect may be imagined, and Jack's eyes ached as this grotesque confusion of crude tints blazed in the strong sunlight. In front of the teocalli, to the left, was a large serpent-skin drum, used for summoning the devotees of the god ; but Jack did not look so much at this as at an object which he viewed with horrified repugnance. This was a huge block of jasper, slanting and polished, on which many unhappy beings had been

slain, on which he himself was destined to suffer. Only by a strong effort did he keep his eyes for a moment on this couch of death, and then averted them with a shudder.

Rising from his seat, he walked towards the door of the temple, and was met at the entrance by Cocom. The Indian threw a glance down the staircase, to see that no one was ascending, and then stood on one side to let Jack pass into the shrine.

"You can enter now, Señor, and speak with safety."

It was some time before Jack's eyes became accustomed to the gloom, for the shrine was only lighted from the door. In this vast apartment twilight prevailed, and showed but dimly the flash of jewels, the glitter of gold and silver. The sides were encrusted with stucco, carved with figures of Aztec deities, which formed the court to the terrible war-god. Teoyamiqui, the goddess of death, was there, with her skirt of platted snakes; Teotl, the supreme deity of Anahuac; Tlacatecolotl, his enemy, the spirit of evil; Quetzalcoatl, Tlaloc, Centeotl, and many other gods of that terrible hierarchy. Masks formed of turquoise

stones hung on the walls, here and there were small altars, on which burned scented gums, and, at the end of the hall, under a canopy of richly carved and gilded wood, sat the terrible one, the war-god Huitzilopochtli.

His image was scarcely human, but seemed to be simply a block of wood distorted into hideous shapes. In one hand he grasped a bow, in the other a sheaf of arrows, delicate humming-bird feathers adorned his left foot, and his waist was encircled by a serpent formed of precious stones, emeralds, turquoises, pearls, all glittering dimly in the pale twilight. Behind the god spread a sheet of solid gold, carved with the attributes of his deity, and in front of him appeared a grotesquely carved altar, on which rested a red object. Jack, holding his nose, for the stench of the slaughter-house was terrible, advanced to see what it was. He started back, with an exclamation of horror. It was a bleeding human heart !

As he started back, a blue flare seemed to strike across his eyes. He looked up, and, lo ! The Harlequin Opal. Depending from the roof by a gold thread, the great jewel twisted slowly round in front of the altar, the height of a man from the ground.

With every revolution the colours changed, like those of a chameleon. Now would radiate a bright green flame, then a blue ray would flash like a streak of lightning through the gloom ; at times the whole stone shone yellow as the sun, and oftentimes a fierce tongue of red would dart from its breast. All these changes were caused by the constant twirling of the cord by which it was suspended, and even in the half light the splendid gem scattered its tints on all sides with the utmost brilliance.

Fascinated by the magnificent jewel, Jack stepped forward to examine it closely ; but, just as he laid his finger on it, he heard a voice—

“Beware !”

It was a woman’s voice. He turned in alarm, and saw a woman standing near the doorway. The light fell full on her face, and Jack rushed forward, with a loud cry of joy, to clasp her in his arms.

It was Doña Dolores !

CHAPTER VII.

AN UNEXPECTED MEETING.

Time is fond of strange surprises,
Ne'er we know what is before us ;
Acting as stern Fate advises,
Time is fond of strange surprises.
Empires fall, a nation rises,
Those who hated, now adore us.
Time is fond of strange surprises,
Ne'er we know what is before us.

IT was Dolores ! The lost Dolores, for whom he had sought so long, so vainly. She lay on his breast, sobbing as though her heart would break, and Jack was so overcome with emotion that he could not speak. Cocom, with true delicacy, had withdrawn, and they were alone in the temple. For some moments they could neither speak nor move, but remained locked in one another's arms, silently, passionately, grateful for the meeting. Behind them, the slowly revolving opal flashed out a thin streak of blue. It was an omen of peace, of love.

Jack, as was natural, first recovered himself, and did all in his power to quieten the hysterical emotion of Dolores. The poor girl looked ill and haggard, as well she might, seeing how much she had suffered during the last fortnight. Torn from her home, from her friends, her kindred, her lover, entombed in the sepulchre of a vast forest, with no hope of ever being released, she had abandoned herself to despair. The unexpected appearance of Jack was too much for her overstrained nerves, and she utterly broke down. Duval placed her on a stone near the doorway of the shrine, and, kneeling at her feet, strove to calm her agitation. He was having but ill success, when Cocom appeared in the doorway, and seeing at a glance what was the matter with the girl, at once produced one of those mysterious medicines he constantly carried about with him.

"Let the Señorita drink of this," he said, thrusting a small bottle into Jack's hand. - "Cocom will watch at the staircase that none ascend. But be speedy, Señor. Ixtlilxochitli remains not long away from the opal."

When the Indian withdrew, Jack forced Dolores to

take some of the drink prescribed. The effect was magical, for in a few minutes her sobs ceased, she became composed, and her eyes brightened with joy as she looked at her lover. Jack was still in his serge shooting-suit, high boots and all ; while Dolores, in amber skirt, lace mantilla, and dainty shoes, looked as though she were arrayed for a ball. The Indians had evidently treated her with great tenderness, and save for her haggard looks, she looked little different from what she did at Tlatonac. In their European dresses, they were out of keeping in that savage house of worship. A strange scene, truly. The blood-stained deity, the fantastic figures of the gods, the twirling opal, flashing sparks of light, and at the door these most unhappy lovers, oblivious to all save themselves.

“Querido !” sighed Dolores, looking fondly in Jack’s face ; “how like an angel do you appear to me. I thought never to see you again ; but now you are here, and I am happy. Tell of the dear ones, Juanito, of Eulalia and Rafael. How does my dear uncle, my aunt ?”

“I have not seen them for over a week, cara,” re-

plied Jack, kissing her ; "they were much disturbed at your disappearance. We all thought that you had been carried off to Acauhtzin, and with Don Felipe and your brother I went up there to demand you from the base one."

"I know all of this, mi amigo," said Dolores, quickly. "Ah! do not look so astonished. Cocom is our friend ; Cocom told me all. Of Marina departing with Pepe in *The Pizarro*, of your journey to Acauhtzin, and how you were betrayed to the priests by Don Hypolito."

"You know my story, Dolores, but I do not know yours. Tell me how it was that you were carried off. I at first suspected the Indians, but afterwards deemed Pepe had taken you to Xuarez. I suspected him wrongly, it seems."

"No, Juan!" cried the girl, her eyes flashing with anger ; "all this misery was contrived by Don Hypolito. He told Ixtlilxochitli that——"

"What!" interrupted Jack, in astonishment ; "does Xuarez know the priest? Has he been here? Is he a worshipper of that devil stone?"

"As to that I am not certain, but he has been here

frequently, and held long conversations with Ixtlilxochitli. Don Hypolito, you know, says he is a Mestizo. It is false ; he is a pure Indian. His parents dwelt here as worshippers of the old gods, and it was in Totatzine that he was born. Afterwards, when he became a man, he grew weary of this buried city, and went forth to seek his fortune. He prospered, as you know, and now says he has Spanish blood in his veins, to gain favour with my own people. But his heart is Indian ; he is a friend of Ixtlilxochitli ; he comes here frequently. I said, querido, that I was not certain that he worshipped the devil stone. I am wrong ; I think he does. Through him does that opal counsel war ; and you were delivered to the priests to be the victim of the cycle."

"And in return for this handsome gift of my life, what does Don Hypolito get ?"

"Can you not guess ? Ixtlilxochitli, anxious to see the Ruler of Cholocaca one who is a believer in the old gods, has promised to make the Indians fight for him. He can do this by means of the opal's prophecies. The priest thinks that if Don Hypolito becomes President, he will restore the worship of Huitzilopochtli."

"Ridiculous!"

"It is not. Yet Ixtlilxochitli, who is a clever man, is completely deceived by Don Hypolito, and believes that this will be so."

"Now I see how Xuarez came to the sacred city," said Jack, reflectively; "but you say it was he who carried you off?"

"By means of the Indians, yes. Listen, Juanito. The last time Don Hypolito was here, he told Ixtlilxochitli that he desired to marry me; also, that if I were not carried off from Tlatonac, and placed for safety in the opal shrine, that I would probably marry you. As you can guess, it would never do to let the guardian of the opal marry a white man, so, as desired by Don Hypolito, I was decoyed from Tlatonac, and carried to this frightful place."

"How were you decoyed?"

"By means of your friend, Don Pedro."

"By Pedro!" cried Jack, in surprise. "Why, what had he to do with your kidnapping?"

"He had nothing actually to do with it. But his name was used in this way. Listen, mi cara; it is the strangest of tales."

Jack nodded and settled himself to listen, whereon Doña Dolores began her story at once, as every moment was precious.

"When you left me on that day, Juanito, I went to the cathedral, in order to pray for you, and to obtain from Padre Ignatius the holy relic for your protection. With Marina did I kneel before the shrine of the Virgin, and waited for the Padre, but he did not appear."

"Nevertheless, he was in the cathedral all the time waiting for you in the sacristy."

"That is strange," observed Dolores, in some perplexity, "for I grew weary of waiting, and sent Marina to seek Padre Ignatius in the sacristy. As she did not return, I presumed that she could not find him, and had perhaps gone to look for him in his own church."

"She went neither to sacristy nor to church," explained Jack, hastily; "she saw Pepe at the door of the cathedral, as she went to seek the good Father, and departed with the zambo. Then she was afraid of being punished by you, and did not return to the Casa Maraquando until late, when we found you were

missing. I expect it was fear that made her run off to Acauhtzin with Pepe."

"Very probably ; yes, Juan, it was as you say. She did not go for the Padre, and he, waiting in the sacristy, expected me to meet him there. I, on my part, thinking Marina would return every moment, remained before the shrine. Then I felt a hand touch my shoulder, and turned round expecting to see Marina. It was a dwarf Indian, called T'ho, who gave me a message from—as I thought—Cocom and Don Pedro."

"But it was not Cocom who betrayed you, Dolores?"

"No, indeed. But through the craft of Ixtlilxochitli, his name was made use of as a decoy. This Indian, T'ho, did not speak, but gave me an object message."

"Dios ! What is that?"

"Do you not know, Juanito? and yet you have dwelt so long in Cholocaca. An object message is one the meaning of which is read by certain things delivered. For instance, querido, in this case, T'ho gave me a yellow flower and several objects cut in bark, in-

cluding an arrow, a pair of spectacles, and a round coloured red. Now can you understand ? ”

“ The yellow flower meant Cocom ! Is that not so ? He told me to-day his name was from such a flower.”

“ Yes, that is right—the spectacles ? ”

“ Eh, Dolores ! The spectacles ! Oh, I know ; Peter wears spectacles.”

“ You’re right, *mi amigo*,” replied Dolores, smiling at his discovery, “ and the arrow was a hint to be swift—the rough piece of bark, coloured scarlet, showed that some one was wounded.”

“ Wait a moment, Dolores,” interposed Duval, hastily ; “ I can read the message now. It came presumably from Cocom, and read, ‘ Come quickly, Don Pedro is wounded.’ ”

Dolores clapped her hands.

“ Santissima Madre ! You have guessed rightly. That was the message. At once I obeyed it, for I thought poor Don Pedro might be dying.”

“ It was kind of you, Dolores, but terribly rash.”

“ I did not think it would be far away from the gates, and suspected no evil. Besides, I had been kind to T’ho, and did not dream he would betray me.”

“ Which he did ? ”

“ Yes, base criminal, he did. I followed him from the church just as the sun was setting. He led me through the streets out of the town by the Puerta de la Culebra. No one recognised me, as I veiled my face in my mantilla. T’ho guided me past the chapel of Padre Ignatius to the open country—— ”

“ How rash of you ! ” ejaculated Jack, reproachfully, “ how terribly rash ! ”

“ Yes, it was rash, Juanito ! But do not be angry, querido. I did it for the sake of Don Pedro, whom I thought was wounded.”

“ Well ! and what happened after that ? ” said Duval, kissing her, to show he was not cross.

“ Dios ! ” replied Dolores, tapping her mouth with her closed fan ; “ I hardly remember ! I was asking T’ho where lay the poor Señor Americano, when a cloth was flung over my head, and I was borne swiftly away. With the shock, I suppose I must have fainted, for on recovering my senses I found myself in an open boat going up the coast. I tried to cry out, but was so weak that I could make no sound. Only Indians were in the boat, and one of them held a cup of wine

to my lips. It was, I think, drugged, as I then lost all consciousness, and awoke to find myself in Totatzine !”

“ And all this was planned by Don Hypolito ? ”

“ Yes, and executed by Ixtlilxochitli. I have been kindly treated since I have been here, and have a house yonder, across the square, all to myself, with attendants. The high priest told me I had been carried off so that no harm might happen to me, as guardian of the opal, during the war. He also informed me that it was the desire of the god that I should wed with Don Hypolito.”

“ Confound his impudence,” muttered Jack, in his native tongue. “ And what did you reply, Dolores ? ”

“ I said I would never wed with the traitor Xuarez; that my heart was given to another, to Don Juan, the Americano. Ixtlilxochitli was terribly angry when he heard this, and swore that never would the guardian of the opal be permitted to wed a white man. ‘ But I have no fear,’ said this base one, ‘ for Don Hypolito, the true worshipper of the sacred opal, will aid us to secure this evil Americano, and sacrifice him to the gods.’ ”

"And Don Hypolito succeeded," said Jack, with a shudder. "The wretch! he had made up his mind to seize me from the moment I set foot in Acauhtzin. Oh, if I can only escape, how dearly will I make him pay for all this treachery."

At this moment Cocom darted in at the door.

"Señor, the priest, Ixtlilxochitli, is climbing the steps. Hide yourself, lady. You must not be seen with my lord."

"Why not?" asked Jack, as they arose to their feet.

"Can you ask, after what I have told you?" whispered Dolores, hurriedly. "The priest knows I love you, and if we were seen together you would be detained in prison until the day of the sacrifice. Not even your character of a god could save you from that. Cocom contrived our meeting here, and the priests suspect nothing. Trust to Cocom! He will tell you our plans of escape. Adios! I must hide!"

"When will I see you again, angelito?" said Jack, kissing her hurriedly.

"To-morrow night, in the secret way. Adios!"

She ran rapidly towards the shrine, and vanished

behind the image of the war-god, while Jack followed Cocom out on to the vast platform of the pyramid. Midway on the steps they saw the old high priest, painfully climbing upward.

"Will he not find Doña Dolores in there, Cocom, and thus guess we have met?"

"No; Señor. He but comes to see that the sacred fire burns. That the opal yet spins before the god. If the fire should go out, or the opal stand still, great calamities would befall the city. Only does the opal pause when it prophesies."

"How is it managed?"

"Santissima! Señor, I know not. But come, let us go down. Ixtlilxochitli will just look at the fire, and then descend, after which the Doña Dolores can come down and regain her palace without being seen."

"Is the shrine thus frequently left alone?"

"Yes, Señor. Save at festivals, it is deserted. But a priest climbs to the temple every five hours, to see that the sacred fire burns. But see, Ixtlilxochitli is near us. Be cautious, my lord."

When Jack paused on his downward way, the

priest coming up at once knelt on the steps to show his reverence.

"Tell the old fool to get up," said Jack, angrily, being weary of such mummary.

"My lord bids you rise, Ixtlilxochitli!" translated Cocom, more politely.

The priest arose, with his hands folded across his breast, and, with downcast eyes, addressed Cocom.

"Has my lord seen the holy shrine, and the thrice sacred Chalchuih Tlatonac?"

"Yes; my lord has been graciously pleased to look at these things."

"It is well! My lord should know well the sacred shrine, so that on the great day he be prepared to act his part, as saviour of the city, with dignity."

"Deuce take your dignity!" cried Jack, in a rage when this polite speech was translated. "I say Cocom, cannot we knock this old reprobate down the steps; he wouldn't get up again in a hurry."

"Nay, nay, Señor! such a course would not be wise," replied Cocom, hastily thinking that Jack was about to carry his threat into execution.

"What says my lord?" asked Ixtlilxochitli blandly.

"That he will not keep you longer from the sacred offices of the god."

"It is well! See that my lord has all things, Cocom. The city is his, and we are his, for on his sacrifice to the holy gods does the existence of Totatzine depend."

Cocom did not deem it politic to translate this speech to Jack, fearing lest the young man should thereupon carry out his threat, and kick the old priest down the steps. Already he was so exasperated at being perpetually reminded of his awful position, that it would take but little more to make him kill this bland, servile priest—to punish at least one of his enemies before he was slain himself. Many men would have been paralyzed by the thought of the sacrificial stone, but peril only the more firmly braced Jack's nerves, and relying, as he did, on Cocom's help, and his own energy, he was determined to escape from Totatzine in some way or another. The meeting with Dolores had inspired him with fresh energies; and, after leaving Ixtlilxochitli

climbing the steps, he hurried Cocom to the palace where he was living, with the idea of hearing what plan of escape the Indian had conceived.

Now that Duval had seen Dolores, the reserve hitherto maintained by Cocom entirely vanished, and he professed himself eager to explain his designs. With instinctive caution, however, he refused to converse in the lower room, where Jack habitually slept fearing lest they should be overheard. It is true they constantly spoke the Spanish tongue, of which the priestly spies were woefully ignorant ; but Ixtlilxochitli was quite crafty enough to employ a coast Indian as an eavesdropper ; therefore it was wise to put any such possibility of betrayal beyond all doubt. With this intent, they ascended to the flat roof of the palace ; but, even here, Cocom felt doubtful of being absolutely safe. In the end, they climbed the mirador, the sole tower of the palace, where it was quite impossible that they could be either seen or heard from below. Crouching on his hunkers below the low wall of the tower platform, Cocom gravely took out some cigarettes, wrapped in maize-husks, and presented them to Jack, who was lying full-

length against the opposite parapet. In a few minutes they were smoking, and talking earnestly.

"The priests, Señor," said Cocom, wrapping his zarape round his thin shoulders, "the priests say that the entrance to the secret way is in the shrine itself on the summit of yonder teocalli. That is a lie!"

"Then where is it, Cocom?"

"Three bridges are there over the stream, Don Juan. The largest and oldest bridge is that central one, which leads straight to the square of the sacrifice. Señor, below that bridge is the secret way!"

"How do you know, Cocom? Were you not blindfolded when you were brought here?"

"Yes, Señor; but I smelt water. The priests blind the eyes, and close the ears, so that the way be not seen, nor the voice of the torrent heard; but I, Señor, have come by the hidden way many times. It is there. I examined it secretly one night at the peril of my life."

"And you found out you were correct?" said Jack, anxiously.

"Absolutely, Señor. Under the bridge the torrent

has worn a deep channel ; at the very bottom the path runs eastward, and is concealed by a stone wall made to look like the natural cliff of the stream. You go up that path which leads to the foot of the waterfall, then along a passage which leads upward to the thickest part of the forest. Leaving this passage, you ascend steps, which lead to a narrow gorge, cut in the top of the mountain—deep, very deep, Señor, is the pass ; no one can see the city therefrom. In the centre of the pass is a circular space, whence ten passages, cut from the solid rock, lead everywhere. Go by eight of these passages, and you fall over cliffs, for the path ends abruptly. They are death-traps. Of the other two passages, one leads to the sacred city, the other to the forests beyond the mountains. In this circular place do the priests blindfold the worshippers. Those who go out can reach that place, those who come in the same ; but, unless guided, they would go astray into the death-traps. Therefore are they blindfolded by the priests, and led forward in safety.”

“What a horrible idea,” said Duval, shuddering ;
“but how am I to know the right passage ? ”

"There is a carving of the opal, throwing rays, cut at the entrance of the passage. That is the right one. Go through that, and you come on to a broad platform on the other side of the mountain. Steps lead down from thence to the valley into a broad way built of old by the Toltecs. This road ends suddenly in a wilderness of trees. Then you guide yourself to the coast by red marks on the trunks of trees—the opal, painted crimson, is the sign. Follow those, and you come to the sea-shore."

"How far is it from here to the sea-shore?"

"Fifty miles, Señor."

"Fifty miles!" groaned Jack, in dismay. "However can Dolores manage to do that? and then the perils from incoming Indians!"

"Listen, Señor. Oftentimes the priests send forth penitents who have on them a vow of silence. I will procure dresses for my lord and Doña Dolores. You shall be disguised as Indians under the vow of silence. Should you meet anyone, make a sign thus, and they will permit you to pass without question. As to the length of the way, I will give you provisions, and you must travel to the coast as best you can. It will

take many days, but what of that? You will be free."

"Suppose we are pursued?"

"No, Señor; I have a plan. Beyond the great wall of the west is the narrow path of the cañon. When you and Doña Dolores depart, I will take your clothes through the gate, which is always open, and strew some of them on the narrow path. I will let fall some blood of an animal down the side of the cliff. Below rushes the torrent, white and fearful. When the priests find out you are gone they will not search the secret way, not thinking that it is known to anyone but themselves. No, Don Juan, they will go beyond the wall, to the narrow path, and there they will find your clothes, and those of Doña Dolores. They will then think that you have fallen into the torrent, and so all search will cease."

"That's a capital idea, Cocom! Your ingenuity is wonderful. But when myself and Doña Dolores come to the coast, what shall we do?"

"Wait there, Señor, in a cave I will describe to you, until I come. I will have to remain behind so as to avert suspicion. Yes; I will tear my hair when you

have gone, and say that you have fled by the way of the cañon; the priests will search, and think you have fallen into the torrent. The next day, they will thrust me from the sacred city for having not guarded you well. I will then come down to the coast, to the cave. Once there, Señor, and we shall soon contrive some plan to get back to Tlatonac."

"But the priests might kill you, Cocom!"

"Have no fear of that, Señor; I am old, my sacrifice would not be acceptable to the gods. And again, Señor, I have secrets of herbs known only to myself, which the priests fain would learn. Should they threaten my life, I will tell them my secrets and go free."

"You can never return to Totatzine?"

"What matter," replied Cocom, indifferently. "I am very old. Soon I will die. When I get again to Tlatonac I will worship the Virgin, and die in my corner. Who will care? The old have no friends!"

"You will have a friend in me, Cocom," said Jack, shaking the hand of the old Indian. "I promise you that neither myself nor Doña Dolores will forget this service. By the way, when do we make this attempt?"

"To-morrow night, Señor."

"Bueno! But why to-morrow night?"

"At dawn, Señor, to-morrow, there will be a sacrifice to the god, and a man will die. The priests will ask you be present so as to sanctify the ceremony."

"A kind of rehearsal, I suppose," said Jack, grimly.
"Go on, Cocom."

"Afterwards there will be a great festival. All day it will continue, till sunset. It may be," continued Cocom, artfully, "that the priests and the people will drink much; if so, it will be the better for us. In any case, Don Juan, all will be weary, and sleep well at sunset. Then I will disguise you and Doña Dolores as Indians, and lead you to the secret way. By dawn you will be far down beyond the mountains. Travel all night, Señor, so as to reach the central forests before dawn. For it may be that the priests will look from the platform down the road of the Toltecs, and there see you far off. But this, I think, will not be. The whole city will sleep heavily, exhausted by the festival, and when they waken, you, Señor, will have escaped."

"God grant this scheme may succeed!" said Duval,

rising to his feet. "I can never thank you sufficiently for this, Cocom."

"Bueno! You are the friend of Don Miguel, who saved my life. Be happy, Señor; I will not fail to rescue you from the stone of Huitzilopochtli. And now, Señor Juan, we must go down, else will the priests be suspicious of these long talks between us."

"There is only one thing I would like to do before I leave Totatzine," remarked Duval, as they went down to his room.

"And that, Señor?"

"Is to break the neck of Ixtlilxochitli by throwing him down those steps."

Cocom laughed softly. It was a rare thing for this melancholy Indian to do, but he did not love Ixtlilxochitli, and the idea amused him greatly.

"Come," said Duval, tapping his friend on the back, "let us go and take the eleven. We must drink success to our scheme in a flask of aguardiente."

CHAPTER VIII.

AN INDIAN FESTIVAL.

The sacred drums of serpents' skins
 Send forth their muffled roar afar ;
 Before the shrine the opal spins,
 A changing star !

That flashes rays of rainbow light
 From out its breast of cloudy white,
 Rebuking sins
 Which mar !

Oh, see the maidens forward bound,
 To swing and sway in dances wild,
 Loose locks with fragrant chaplets crowned,
 Their glances mild !
 Exchanged for looks, whose frantic fires
 The sacred god himself inspires,
 Who thrice hath frowned,
 And smiled.

The victim ! see the victim pure !
 Approaches to the stone to die ;
 But for a space his pangs endure,
 And then on high
 His soul mounts upward to the sun,
 For ever with that orb to run,
 Of pleasure sure
 For aye.

THAT evening, Jack received an invitation from
 Ixtlilxochitli to be present at dawn next morning on

the summit of the teocalli, to take part in a religious ceremony of peculiar solemnity. The god Huitzilopochtli was to be asked if it was his will that the Indian tribes should array their ranks in battle on the side of Don Hypolito Xuarez? Through the opal was the answer to be given. If it gleamed red the god desired war, if blue there was to be peace in the land. Seeing the bloodthirsty character of the deity, and the secret understanding between his high priest and Xuarez, there was but little doubt in the mind of Jack as to what the answer would be. Still, as he was anxious to know how the prophecies were given, and not averse to seeing a unique religious ceremony, he accepted the invitation of Ixtlilxochitli with avidity.

For many days, messages had been sent far and wide, calling on the Indians to repair to the sacred city, and assist at the festival. The town was filled to overflowing, and all the caravanseries in the square of the sacrifice were crowded. Owing to the depth of the valley, the ceremony could not take place precisely at dawn, as it was some time before the sun rose above the peaks of the surrounding mountains. His presence was indispensable to the ceremony, as the

heart of the victim had to be held up by the officiating priest for the benediction of his rays. Jack rather shrank from witnessing this horrible rite, particularly as, unless he succeeded in effecting his escape, he would probably be forced to take part in the same function; but curiosity triumphed over repugnance, and he looked forward eagerly to beholding this extraordinary spectacle.

In the grey light of dawn he was awakened by the thunder of the serpent-skin drums, which for some hours roared continuously. Springing out of bed, he hastily put on his clothes, and had just finished dressing when Cocom entered the room. The old Indian was arrayed in white cotton garments, with a chaplet of flowers on his grey locks. He had another wreath, of red blossoms, which he held out for Jack's acceptance—an offer which that young man promptly refused. Red was the emblem of a dedicated victim, and Jack, knowing this, objected to being thus distinguished.

"Carrajo! No, mi amigo," he said, vigorously, "I am not going to be decked out as a victim yet."

"Ixtilxochitli will be angry, Señor."

"He can be as angry as the devil, for all I care. I don't intend taking any part in this infernal idol worship. Don't they look on me as a god, Cocom?"

"Yes, my lord; you are supposed to be the visible representative of Tezcatlipoca, the soul of the universe."

"Bueno! Well, the soul of the universe is going to have his own way. What is the use of being Tez—what's-his-name, if you can't do as you please? Besides, I wear European clothes, and wreaths don't go with this rig-out."

"As you please, Don Juan. Still, it is not wise to anger the priests."

"I'll take the risk, Cocom. By the way, I trust Doña Dolores will not be present at this butchery to-day."

"No, Señor! She intends to sleep many hours."

"Poor girl, she needs rest, seeing we shall be walking all night. I will rest this afternoon myself, Cocom."

"It would be wise, Señor."

"You have everything prepared?"

"Assuredly, Señor. You will find nothing wanting."

"Bueno! Now let us go to the teocalli."

The immense area of the square of sacrifice was densely packed with Indians, mostly men, as the ceremonies of the war-god were pre-eminently of a masculine character. A few women were to be seen; but, as a rule, they preferred the gentler worship of Tezcatlipoca, and left the fierce adoration of Huitzilopochtli to the rulers and warriors. These pilgrims were one and all arrayed in white-cotton robes similar to that of Cocom, and, like him, bore wreaths of flowers on their locks. Many of the most opulent were draped in mantles of gorgeous feather work, and adorned their persons with collars, earrings, girdles, and bracelets of gold set with rough gems. The summit of the teocalli was unoccupied, as the priests in their sable vestments were waiting for the victim at the foot of the great staircase. A constant thunder of drums, and shrilling of discordant trumpets, added to the wild character of the scene.

Jack had no sooner made his appearance than the multitude, recognising the sacred victim of the cycle, parted to let him pass through. An immense wave of movement swept across this sea of white garments, and all flung themselves on their faces, not even

daring to look at the august presence of the incarnate deity. Attended by Cocom, Jack passed up the avenue, opened by religious awe in this living mass, and ultimately gained the steps of the teocalli. Here they saw Ixtlilxochitli, who waved his hand to intimate that they had better ascend the staircase, which they did, without further remark.

Seated on the parapet surrounding the platform of the pyramid, Jack looked down on the throng of people whose dark faces were turned upwards to the shrine of the opal, and shuddered involuntarily, as he thought of the fanaticism which had drawn this concourse together. Devoutly did he pray that Cocom's scheme might be successful, as it was terrible to think that in the presence of such savages he should be slaughtered by those wild-looking priests.

The morning was slightly chilly, as the valley was yet in the shadow ; but, beyond the rim of the mountains, Jack could see the rays of the rising sun shooting up in the roseate sky. He trembled and held his breath as a single trumpet bellowed below, and leaning over the parapet, saw that the procession of priests were now escorting the victim up the stair-

case. Cocom manifested no emotion, he was but half civilised, after all, and the horror of the coming deed did not strike him as particularly awful. Men must die sometime, was Cocom's philosophic view of the matter, and as well might death take place on the sacrificial stone as in any other way. Jack felt his flesh creep at the idea of what he would soon behold ; but Cocom, with folded arms, stood like a statue of bronze, silent, indifferent, unmoved.

Up the staircase climbed that ghastly procession. The victim, a handsome young Indian, tall and slender, seemed indifferent to his fate, and bore his part in the ceremony with becoming dignity. As he ascended the height, one by one he threw away his ornaments and rich robes. His chaplet of flowers, his bracelets, earrings, girdles, his mantle of feather work, his cotton robe of white, they were all strewed on the steps like wreckage, and when he arrived at the summit of the teocalli, he was completely naked. With his splendid muscular development, his immobile face, his absolute repose, standing nude by the jasper stone of sacrifice, he looked like a magnificent bronze statue, and Jack could not but admire the stoical

resignation with which he met his death. Ixtlilxochitli vanished through the open door of the shrine, and the sable-clad priests, looking like demons in their religious frenzy, held up their arms to the east. A wild, barbaric chant flowed from their mouths, weird and ear-piercing, rising and falling like the waves of the sea. They chanted long lines of invocation to the sun, and were answered by a confused roar from the multitude below. So fierce, so savage was the music, that Jack shuddered and closed his eyes with horror. The victim made no sign.

Then the high priest, clad in scarlet robes, and holding a knife of itzli in his hand, came forth from the presence of the god, and made a sign to the officiating priests. The rim of the sun was just seen above the heights when five priests darted forward, and, seizing the impassive victim, flung him on the altar stone. An appealing cry to Huitzilopochtli arose from the worshippers, the drums rolled, the trumpets bellowed, and Ixtlilxochitli rapidly opening the breast of the young man, tore out his heart. The multitude prostrated themselves humbly, an immense sigh exhaled upward from a thousand

breasts, and after holding the bleeding heart to the sun, now full in sight, the high-priest flung it at the feet of the idol. Jack felt sick with horror at the consummation of this tragedy, and closed his eyes for a moment. When he opened them again, the dead body of the victim was rolling down the steps of the teocalli, to plunge into the sea of white boiling in the square.

"Horrible!" he muttered to Cocom; "these priests are devils."

"Hush, Señor!" replied the Indian in a low voice; "be cautious. Now they consult the opal."

Wiping the perspiration from his forehead, Duval, leaning on the arm of Cocom, entered the shrine which was crowded with priests. They all made way for him respectfully, and, as the great drum outside commenced to roll out its thunder, knelt in the presence of the deity. Even Cocom bowed before the god, and Jack was the only one standing. A small fire of coals burned on the altar, and thereon Ixtlilxochitli flung priceless gums, storax, copal, and odorous resins. A rich perfume spread through the temple, and a thick cloud of white smoke rolled upward, veiling the hideous face of the war-god,

hiding the now rapidly revolving opal. A chant arose, sad and melancholy as the sweeping of the wind through trees, supplicating and sorrowful—an appeal to the terrible deity who had been thus propitiated with blood, with the heart of a man.

A thin shaft of sunlight entering the temple through some unseen opening, smote the great gem with fierce fire, causing it to glitter with blinding splendour. Every eye was fixed on the opal, which continued spinning incessantly, darting its rays of red and blue, and yellow, and green. Jack, at a glance, saw how the miracle was done. The priests cunningly twisted the gold string attached to the roof, and as it slowly unwound itself the great gem revolved. Whether they left the colour it was to show when still, to chance, Jack did not know, but they must have had some trick to make it pause when they chose, for he felt certain the red side of the stone would ultimately reveal itself. In the semi-darkness he kept his gaze on the jewel, twirling in the yellow glare, and heard, as in a dream, the roar of the throng far below waiting the announcement of the god's will. The teocalli was as an island

in the midst of a sea, and against its huge base these living waves beat without intermission.

At first the opal spun rapidly, throwing out sparks of coloured fire, then it gradually slowed down as the string unwound itself. Slower and slower it twisted, sparkling a ray of emerald green, a dazzling shaft of blue, or a glory of golden haze. At last the motion was hardly perceptible, and the worshippers held their breaths in reverential awe. It moved slightly, it paused, it began to revolve slowly backward, and then, with a slow oscillation, hung motionless from the roof. From out its white breast shot a fierce glare of violent crimson. The will of the god was war !

Amid a dead silence Ixtlilxochitli stalked forth to the verge of the staircase, now wearing only his black garments, and held up his scarlet mantle as a sign that the opal was red. A frantic shout of delight roared upward to the sky, and the multitude below broke into a frenzy of joy. The religious ceremonies were at an end, the festival had commenced.

" Por el amor de Dios, let me go back to my room," whispered Jack, in the ear of Cocom. " If I stay

here, I will assuredly smash that idol and kick old Ixtlilxochitli down the steps."

Unwilling to risk such a scandal, Cocom hurried his charge out of the temple at once. Ixtlilxochitli came forward as Jack departed, evidently expecting to be congratulated on a successful performance, but the young engineer, with a gesture of repugnance, turned his back on the old villain, and sprang down the steps of the teocalli. The high-priest looked grave. This dissatisfaction of the visible deity was a bad omen.

"This place is a hell upon earth," cried Jack, throwing himself down on his couch. "How many victims do they sacrifice to that infernal deity, Cocom?"

The old man counted on his fingers.

"Señor, about one hundred in the year, more or less."

"How terrible!"

"Yes, Don Juan, more were offered up in the old days. It is said by the priests that at the dedication of the great Teocalli in Mexico seventy thousand victims were offered to Huitzilopochtli."

"Butchery! I tell you what, Cocom, if I get safely back, and this war is concluded in favour

of the Junta, I will get Don Francisco Gomez to send an army to stop this sort of thing."

Cocom smiled scornfully.

"Nay, Señor ; no army could reach the city of Totatzine. It is hidden, and the secret way is but narrow, as you shall see. Besides, Don Juan, I would not aid an army to come hither. The city is sacred."

"But you do not believe in this devil-worship?"

"No, Señor. Still, it was the religion of my fathers. I do not wish it destroyed."

Jack saw that his proposition was distasteful to the old Indian, so did not make further remark, fearful of raising anger in Cocom's breast. If this one friend refused to assist them, neither himself nor Dolores could hope to escape. Therefore Jack was wise and held his peace. Shortly afterwards he intimated his desire to sleep in order to prepare for the fatigue of the midnight journey, so Cocom left him, and departed to make all arrangements for the escape.

All day long the festival continued. Even through the massive walls of his room Jack could

hear the shrieks and yells of the worshippers as they maddened themselves with pulque and aguar-diente. Once he had the curiosity to ascend to the flat roof and look down on the square. It was filled with a mass of frenzied human beings, who danced and sang, and bellowed wildly. Some cut themselves with knives, others climbing up to the summit of the teocalli flung themselves headlong down the staircase. Great fires were lighted in the square, and rings of Indians, men and women, danced round them, singing frantically. Everywhere the priests, long-haired, sable-robed, inciting worshippers to fresh frenzies, constantly the wild piping of barbaric music, the rumbling of drums. It was a horrible sight, this madness of the multitude, and after a glance or so Jack descended to his bedroom to think over the future.

He was anxious to regain Tlatonac and see his friends once more. Philip and Peter, and Tim, would be grieving for his loss ; but they, no doubt, thought that he was at Acauhtzin and not pent up in this city of devildom. Jack knew well that Philip would never have turned *The Bohemian's* nose south unless he had

been compelled to do so. Against the heavy guns of ships and forts the bravest man could do nothing, and the yacht had been forced to retreat. Doubtless Philip had steamed direct to Tlatonac, and insisted on an army being sent to Acauhtzin to release his friend and Dolores. But this could not be ; as Jack felt sure there were no transports to take the soldiers northward by sea, and the inland route was impossible.

How had the war gone? Had the torpederas arrived? or had Don Hypolito sent the war-ships filled with soldiers southward to attack Janjalla, and from thence forced his way overland to the capital? The campaign would probably be conducted as theorised by Don Rafael. Xuarez would first capture Janjalla, march his troops northward across the plains to effect a conjunction with the Indians before the walls of Tlatonac, and then bring his war-ships up to the capital. In this way the city would be assaulted on both sides : bombarded by the war-ships, and stormed by the regular troops of the *Opposidores* and the Indian tribes.

"I must escape," thought Duval, as he restlessly

tossed and turned on his couch. "This last order of the Opal will send an Indian army to the walls of Tlatonac. I know all or most of the plans of Xuarez and when I tell them to Don Francisco he may be able to thwart them. It is now two weeks since I was taken by that infernal Don Hypolito, and we cannot regain Tlatonac for at least another five or six days, if, indeed then. Three weeks is a long time, and many events may have happened. I hope those fellows are all right. Once I get back, we shall manage to baffle Xuarez in some way."

These thoughts were not conducive to slumber, but during the afternoon he managed to obtain a few hours of sleep. The herbal medicines of Cocom had completely restored him to health, and he now felt strong enough to undergo the hardships of the journey to the coast. Dolores, however, was delicate, and Jack dreaded to think how she would suffer. Still, it was a case of life or death, so it was best to make the attempt. Anything was better than the certainty of a horrible death for one, constant imprisonment for the other. At whatever cost, they must escape.

"It's a case of Pike's Peak, or bust," said Jack recalling the favourite expression of an American comrade. "I hope to the Lord we won't bust, this trip."

Towards sunset Cocom came to wake him for the great attempt. He brought a very gratifying report as to the state of the population, who were all either drunk or worn out with religious frenzy. The priests were scarcely better, and in three hours not a soul in the sacred city would be capable of observation or movement. It is true that in the commercial half of the town across the torrent, many people might be on the alert; but fortunately the entrance to the secret way was on the sacerdotal side of the bridge, so that the two lovers could escape unseen. Jack was delighted to hear that things promised so well, and proceeded under the supervision of Cocom to disguise himself as an Indian.

It was not a particularly agreeable task, for he had to strip to the buff, and sponge himself from head to foot with a liquid so as to darken his skin. He was also forced to sacrifice his moustache, as the Central American Indians have no hair on their faces. Jack

sorely rebelled against this demand, but recognising that there was no help for it, he shaved himself clean as directed, stained his face, dyed his hair, and at length stood out a very athletic young Indian. Being thus physically perfect, he assumed sandals of hide, short white cotton drawers, a loose cotton shirt, an ample scarlet woollen mantle, and a crown of peacock's feathers. Cocom also adorned him with a plentitude of bracelets and jingling ornaments. Thus arrayed, Jack was supposed to be a penitent under a vow of silence, travelling to the coast with his sister.

"I hope, Cocom, there won't be any rain," he said, as he followed the Indian out of the room; "it might wash the dye off."

"No fear! no rain," replied the Indian, confidently; "the staining will hold, Señor. Now, not a word! It is dangerous."

So long had the perfecting of the disguise taken that it was now considerably after eight o'clock, and the moon was shining brilliantly in the sky. Guided by the old man, Jack stepped lightly across the square, which was cumbered with human bodies in all

kinds of positions. Some sleeping heavily from exhaustion, others from intoxication, the whole of the immense area looked like a battle-field strewn with dead men. In the midst arose the huge mound of the teocalli, menacing, formidable. Not a sound broke the stillness, save the sigh of some sleeper, or the restless turning of another. Under the clear sky lay the field of the dead, and as Jack stepped gently across the prostrate bodies he could not help shuddering.

Remembering Cocom's caution, however, he uttered no sound, but followed the Indian towards the bridge. Here, in the shadow of the wall, they found Dolores stained as was her lover, and fantastically tricked out in savage finery. When she saw Jack's tall form with the nodding plumes on his head, she could not restrain an exclamation of surprise, but in another moment was clasped in his arms.

"Peace, dear one," whispered Jack, fondly kissing her; "keep your heart brave. We must not wait a moment. Alas! querida, I feel doubtful that you will bear the fatigues of the mountains."

"Fear not, Juanito!" she answered, hastily drying

her tears; "the Virgin will sustain and protect us in the wilderness. With thee by my side, I have no fear."

Cocom, impatient of this delay, made a clucking noise with his tongue, so they at once sprang towards him. He guided them a little distance past the bridge towards the left, and paused before a high wall, pierced by a dozen or more gateways, with massive doors, grotesquely carved. By some trick, known only to himself, the old man opened the valves of one door, and motioned them to enter. On doing so, they found themselves in an immense oblong courtyard, decorated round the walls with nothing but huge statues of the god Huitzilopochtli. Cocom had closed the outside door, and standing in the open court, the fugitives could see no mode of ingress or egress. The moon shining brightly made all things as clear as day, and all around, at intervals of a yard, arose the mighty images, between which was but smooth wall. It was a trap out of which no one could hope to emerge.

"The worshippers, Señor," explained Cocom, in a low voice, "are admitted into this court from the

secret way on the right. When the court is full, their bandages are removed, and no one can tell how he entered, or how he can go out. This confuses all, and then the bandages are replaced, and they are thrust out of those many doors on to the street, and guided to the great square. When they see, they behold but the great teocalli, and cannot tell the way by which they came. Neither can the dwellers in Totatzine, for none are admitted to this court."

"And the secret way?" asked Jack, anxiously.

"Is behind one of those statues, Señor."

Both Jack and Dolores looked blankly at the long line of hideous images against the opposite wall. One statue was as like the other as two peas, and it was absolutely impossible to tell which one concealed the entrance. Jack turned to Cocom, and shook his head.

"If my life depended on it, I could not tell."

"Eh, Señor, your life does depend on it," said Cocom, grimly, enjoying his little joke. "Behold!"

He walked slowly forward, and to all appearance chose a statue at random. Touching a spring in the protuberant stomach of the idol, the massive image

swung outward, revealing a dark passage. The two lovers ran forward, but were stopped by Cocom.

"That passage, Señor, ends with a precipice," he said, with emphasis; "if you went down there, you would fall into the torrent."

"A misleading way," said Duval, shrinking back with a shudder at the horrible imagination of the idea. "Are there others?"

"This, and this, and this," replied Cocom, causing several statues to swing out of their places. "All passages you see, Don Juan; all snares for the unwary. Let me put the images back again. So! Now, Señor, observe. This image of Huitzilopochtli has a representation of the opal in its forehead. That is the mark of the way throughout. See!"

The statue swung round, and Cocom, stepping boldly into the yawning cavity disclosed, beckoned to them to follow. With the terrified Dolores on his arm, Jack did so, and they found themselves at the top of a flight of damp-looking steps. Once inside, and Cocom, pressing the spring, restored the image to its proper position; then, taking Jack's hand, led him down the staircase. Claspng Dolores tightly,

he cautiously descended into the pitchy gloom. They seemed to be proceeding into the bowels of the earth. Down, and down, and still down, until the hoarse roar of the torrent struck their ears, and emerging into a darkness little less dense than that in the passage, they found themselves on a rocky ledge, below the huge structure of the bridge, almost on a level with the water. At their feet swirled and foamed the flood, raging over sharp-pointed rocks. To the right, a path led upward in a gentle slope ; to the left, a similar path descended. Cocom pointed to this latter.

“ Another trap, Señor,” he said, grimly, “ ending in the cañon. Take that path, and you would die. Follow this one to the right, and it will lead you to the great platform beyond the mountains. From thence you can descend by the great way, and when in the forest, track your path by the scarlet sign of the opal. Always the opal, Señor. Go nowhere but where that sign points.”

“ I will remember,” replied Jack, confidently.

“ Take this wallet, Señor. It contains food for some days, and cacao leaves, and strong drink. It

will last until you reach the cave whereof I told you. Wait there for me, and I will come shortly. Remember always the rule of silence—that you are both penitents—the sign thus—lip and forehead. Now go, Señor. I depart to scatter your clothes on the narrow way, and spread a false report of your death in the torrent, while escaping. In four days, Señor, expect me at the cave. Adios, lady of the precious stone, and you, Señor.”

He sprang backward into the darkness up the stair, and left the lovers standing in that gloomy inferno, with the torrent roaring below, the huge masonry of the bridge high above, and, to the right, that perilous way which they must tread to reach safety. Duval expected Dolores to give way at thus finding herself in such danger, but, to his surprise, she was brave, and gay, and strong.

“Come, querido,” she said, cheerfully, “let us go at once. We must reach the forests before dawn, if possible.”

“It will exhaust you terribly, angelito!”

“Probably. Still, I must keep up, if only for your sake! Come, querido! let us depart.”

They moved simultaneously towards the right.

Oh, that interminable passage, long and narrow and always ascending. They thought it would never end ; but at length it terminated at the foot of the waterfall. Down from a great height thundered great masses of water, smashing to foam in the basin below. The spray, rising fine and mist-like, was damp on their faces. They could not hear themselves speak, owing to the roar. Jack grasped the hand of Dolores to give her courage, and turned off abruptly to the right where they entered a passage cut out of the solid rock. Still gently sloping upward, the path lead them out into a vast clearing, girdled on all sides by great trees. The moon shone bright as day ; and across the grass ran an indistinct track. Following this, they found a great flight of steps leading upward under the boughs of mighty trees—pine, and oak, and hemlock, throwing their giant branches across, and almost shutting out the moonlight sky. The staircase was crumbled and old, but wonderfully built of great blocks of stone. Jack could not restrain his admiration at this Titanic work.

“ How did they do it ? ” he said to Dolores, as they

painfully climbed up the superb stair ; " they must have known a lot about engineering, those Toltecs. To swing these blocks into their places must have taken derricks and complicated machinery. A wonderful work ; a wonderful race. How Philip would enjoy this ! "

" I think Señor Felipe would rather be where he is—in Tlatonac," replied Dolores, wearily. " I would I were in the Casa Maraquando."

" Cheer up, my heart ! We will be there in a few days. Will I carry you, cara ? "

" Dios, no ! You are already laden ! "

" But you are as light as a feather."

" Eh, Juanito. You would not find that after carrying me for an hour or so. No ; I am still able to walk. I am stronger than you think."

They steadily climbed up the staircase, and at length entered the narrow gorge described by Cocom. Here Jack made the girl sit down and drink some wine, which did her so much good that in a few minutes she declared herself ready to resume the journey. Thus fortified, they entered the gorge, and, cautiously following its windings, at length emerged

suddenly into a circular space. So unexpectedly did they enter that, as passages opened out in all directions, they could not tell by which way they had come. This pit—for it was little else, hewn out of the rock—was fifty or sixty feet in depth, and must have represented years of toil. On all sides, innumerable passages darted out like rays, and it was this thought that caused Jack to exclaim—

“It is like the opal, Dolores. This space is the stone, those passages the rays; so it serves a double purpose—to mislead the runaway, and yet be a symbol of the Chalchuih Tlatonac.”

Fortune favoured the fugitives, for the moon, directly overhead, sent down her full glory into the pit. Had they arrived later, they would probably have had to wait till dawn, as the blackness would have been too intense to permit them to find the true outlet. But the moonlight, by happy chance, was so strong that, after carefully examining the sides of several entrances, Jack at length hit on the sign. A huge crimson blot, with scarlet rays, blazed on a passage to the right.

“Here we are, Dolores,” cried Duval, joyfully, “this

is the right way; but we must be careful, and not risk a snare; one can never tell what these infernal Indians are up to."

With great caution they entered the tunnel indicated by the sign, and feeling every step before them, for the whole place was intensely dark, moved onward at a snail's pace. The tunnel wound hither and thither, until they felt quite bewildered. For a time the passage was level, but after a series of turnings it began to slope gently downwards, and so continued to the entrance.

"I hope to Heaven there are no branch tunnels," said Jack, anxiously, "we could easily go off the main track in this gloom."

"I am sure there are no side tunnels," replied Dolores, decisively; "even the priests could not find their way through this place otherwise than with one way. If there were other tunnels, they would lose themselves, and that they would not care to risk."

"Well, let us move on. At all events, the tunnel is getting straighter," remarked Jack, hopefully. "I wish Cocom had given us a torch."

"What is that yonder?" cried Dolores, pressing his arm. "A gleam of light."

"Bueno! It is the exit. Come, Dolores, and say no word, lest, when we emerge on to the platform, there should be Indians waiting there. Remember our vow of silence."

Encouraged by this sign of deliverance, they hurried rapidly forward, quite certain that the ground was safe, and in a few minutes stepped out of the tunnel's mouth on to a mighty platform, half way down the mountain. Jack cast a swift glance to right and left, but the area of masonry was quite bare. They were the only human beings thereon. He turned to speak to Dolores, and found her staring motionless at the magnificent scene before her.

The platform, Jack guessed, was fully a quarter of a mile in length, and enormously wide. It had first been hewn out of the living rock, and then faced with masonry, flagged with stones. Here was adopted the same device for misleading strangers as had been done in the court of the gods, at the entrance from Totatzine. The whole face of the cliff, at the back of the terrace, was perforated with tunnels, and now that

they had moved to the verge of the platform neither of them could tell which tunnel they had come out of. Saving one, all those passages led to death and destruction. Only one was safe, and that the tunnel distinguished by the opal sign. No one, ignorant of that sign, could have escaped death.

"I don't wonder Totatzine remains hidden," said Jack, thoughtfully. "The whole of that path is a mass of danger and snares. Now, however, we shall have a clearer way."

Turning towards the east, they beheld a vast staircase sloping downward to a broad road, at the sides of which were giant images of the gods. In the pale moonlight they looked like demons, so frightful were their aspects. In long lines, like pillars, they stretched away eastward, into the forests, ending in dim obscurity. On either side, dense foliage; away in the distance, a sea of green trees. There was nothing but trackless woods and this great road, piercing into the emerald profundity like a wedge. Behind, arose tall red cliffs, crowned with ancient trees, tunnelled with black cavities. From thence spread out the platform with its huge blocks of stone, its walls covered with

hieroglyphics, statues of fierce gods, and vast piles of truncated towers. Below, the forests, the roadway, the staircase.

"What a terrible place, Dolores," said Jack, drawing a long breath. "It is like the abode of demons. Come! it is now after midnight, and the moon will soon be setting. While we have the light, let us try to reach the end of yonder avenue."

"One moment, Juan," replied Dolores, drawing forth something from her bosom. "While Cocom was with you, I went up to the shrine of Huitzilopochtli and took in—this."

Between her fingers, in the pale moonlight, it flashed faintly with weak sparks of many coloured fire. Jack bounded forward.

"The Harlequin Opal!" he exclaimed, delighted. "You have taken the Harlequin Opal."

CHAPTER IX.

THE FUGITIVES.

The sun goes down, the twilight wanes,
With reddened spurs and hanging reins,
We urge our steeds across the plains.

For you and I are flying far,
From those who would our loving mar,
And prison you with bolt and bar.

Sigh not, dear one, look not so white,
My castle stands on yonder height,
We'll reach it e'er the morning's light.

The future's joy this night is born,
I wed thee in the early morn,
And laugh my rivals twain to scorn.

IT was fifty miles from Totatzine to the coast Dolores being a woman, and weak, Jack, owing to illness, not being quite so strong as usual, they found it difficult to do more on an average than two miles an hour. To make up for slow walking they stretched out their pedestrianism to twelve hours between dawn and eve, thus reaching the sea-shore in two days. They

arrived at the cave spoken of by Cocom, which was a harbour of refuge to them in their sore distress, completely worn out, body and soul and garments. Still they felt a certain amount of comfort in three consolations: First, they had escaped from Totatzine with their lives. Secondly, the wallet was not yet exhausted of meat and drink, so that they were in no danger of starvation. Thirdly, Cocom, always supposing he would hoodwink the priests as to his share in their escape, would arrive within twelve hours or thereabouts. Thus fortified with food and hope, they stayed thankfully in the cave and waited the arrival of the old Indian.

As to the journey from platform to cave, that had been a horrible dream, a nightmare of hardship, of weariness, of many pangs. Starting from the terrace shortly after midnight, they had traversed the avenue in three hours. It was five miles in length, and proceeding at the rate of two miles every sixty minutes, it can be easily seen that they could gain the shelter of the forest long before dawn. The great road ended abruptly amid a confused heap of ruins, forest trees, tangled undergrowth. Doubtless, in the old time it

had continued even to the coast, but time and the Indians had obliterated all traces of its magnificence five miles down. The former did this because it is his invariable custom to so treat all human works, which set themselves up as enduring for ever; the latter played havoc with the relics of their ancestors' magnificence, so as to hide the city of Totatzine from the eyes of the white destroyers, who had trodden out of existence those same ancestors. Nature had also done her share in the work of destruction, and sent a wave of green trees across the straight line of causeway. Therefore, the road which began so proudly at the foot of the great staircase ended suddenly, after five miles, in the tangled wilderness.

The journey from Totatzine to this point had been long and arduous. The moon had set behind the hills so that it was now dark, and to explore an unknown forest in such gloom would have been foolish, therefore Jack insisted that they should take some rest. In the midst of an old palace he constructed a bed for Dolores with the aid of his and her own cloak, and after seeing her safely bestowed therein, lay down at the entrance so as to act as a sleeping sentinel if such

a thing be possible. Nothing particular occurred, however, and when they awoke the sun was already high in the heavens. Then they made a frugal breakfast and resumed their journey.

The way being no longer clearly defined, their progress was necessarily slow from this point. To the right, on the trunk of a tree, appeared the sign of a scarlet opal as before pictured on the rocks, so to the right they went, and at once, even at these few steps from the causeway, found themselves in the heart of a wild, tropical forest. There was something terrible to these two civilised beings about the primeval savagery of this vegetation and exuberant foliage. Dense, tangled, almost impenetrable, it reminded Jack of the wood grown by fairy power round the palace of the sleeping beauty. That forest, however was to keep lovers out ; this, alas ! served to keep these lovers in. It lay between them and the coast, quite thirty-five miles of wild growth, and at times Dolores almost despaired of breaking through the barrier. Not so Jack, he was hopeful of ultimate success being strengthened in his faith by the constant appearance of the opal sign.

On every side of them rose giant trees of hoary age, their trunks seemingly supporting the verdant roof above-head. At times, so dense were the leaves that sky and sun and kindly light were shut out entirely, and they moved through a translucent twilight of tremulous green. From trunks and boughs depended lianas like ropes binding the forest giants together, or, dropping to the ground, formed a ladder up which climbed the most exquisite flowers. Splendid tree-ferns drooped their gigantic fronds on high, springing thickly from tall pillars, rough, brown, and hairy. Below, the ground was thick with brilliant blossoms, which seized every chance offered by rock, liana, and trunk to climb upward to that light excluded by the sea of foliage overhead.

At every step the forest changed its appearance, as though it were an enchanted wood. Here, all was savagery and gloom; step forward, and lo! a wide and sunny glade. One moment, and they were surrounded by moss-covered rocks; the next, and a noble avenue of palms opened a vista before them. Pools of water sparkled here and there; babbling brooks winding capriciously in and out in wayward circles; at times,

the sudden gleam of a waterfall, threading downwards in white streaks from a giant rock ; and again, the miasma of a swamp, black and evil-looking, in whose waters rolled the trunks of fallen trees. Everywhere flowers bursting into bloom ; everywhere new leaves swelling into being ; everywhere the exuberant life of a tropic climate. The atmosphere was warm and damp, a clammy air permeated the woods, and the whole place was one vast hothouse, where fecundation went on unceasingly. Throughout, a rich perfume pervaded the air, heavy, sickly, and languorous.

Fortunately, Jack's sight had been rendered keen by his profession, else it would have been difficult to have discerned the sign, on trunk of tree, or mossy rock. Scarlet is a noticeable colour, and had the opal sign been the only red hue in the forest, there would have been no difficulty in the matter. But everywhere scarlet flowers made fire of the intense emerald of foliage and grass. Dazzling masses of crimson verbena glared fiercely in the dim gloom, vermilion blossoms burned like lamps in the dense brushwood, wreaths of ruddy leaves made streaks like veins

overhead, and the ground blazed with the pinks and carmines and purples of an infinite variety of blossoms. It was difficult to pick out the red-opal sign amid this constant repetition of the same tints; but Jack, by careful observation, managed to do so, being guided at times by a well-defined path. Indeed, often he was tempted to ignore the sign, and go only by the path; but, as numerous branches led off from the omphalos of the great road, he was afraid of going astray, so kept his reckoning by the opal alone.

For two days they travelled through this zone of verdure, and at length, by the salt smell in the air, became aware that they were nearing the ocean. At times they met Indians, gaudily dressed, with painted faces, and deadly looking weapons; but these, on observing the scarlet mantles of the pair, and receiving the sign on lips and forehead, stepped aside to let them pass. They recognised that these travellers were proceeding eastward by the will of the god, under the vow of silence. Superstition, stronger than greed or cruelty, protected them from the savages of the wilderness.

The journey was not dull, in spite of their anxiety

and dread of being followed. On every side the forest was full of life, and Dolores was delighted to see the constant flashing of humming-birds, green, red and yellow glories, which darted through the still air like flying gems. Once they saw the yellow hide of a jaguar, black spotted, sleek, and terrible. Jack had nothing but a knife, given to him by Cocom, and regretted that he had not his revolver with him. A knife was but a poor weapon to do battle with such a terrible foe. To their relief, however, the animal only eyed them for a few minutes in startled surprise, and then slunk away among the undergrowth. Other perils from wild animals they had none.

Sometimes the whole air would be alive with butterflies. Purple, yellow spotted, azure striped, they fluttered everywhere. One would have thought the flowers were alive, and flew from stem to stem. Peter, as Jack thought, would have been in his element. This forest was the true paradise of butterflies. But they had no time to admire all this skill and fecundity of Nature. Resolutely following the opal sign, they pushed onward through the forest. They saw on all sides the puzzle monkey trees, with

their sharp spikes; ombù trees, whose shade is so dense; aloes, whose branches spread outward like the seven-stemmed candlestick of the Revelation; palms, mangoes, wild fig trees; cactus, burning with fleshy scarlet blossoms, and shallow lagunas, swampy pools of water, filled with sedges and rushes and slimy weeds.

The din was constant. Monkeys swung themselves from bough to bough overhead, chattered without ceasing; parrots, gay plumaged, harsh voiced, shrieked discordantly in their ears; the roaring of jaguars and pumas sounded faint in the distance, like muffled thunder; and ever rasped the stridulation of restless grasshoppers, unseen but noisy.

Such a wealth of invention, such overpowering luxuriance, wore out the senses, wearied the soul. Both Jack and Dolores were glad when the sharp, salt smell of the sea struck knife-like through the enervating atmosphere. They had been travelling since dawn, and now, at noon, on the third day of their departure from Totatzine, they beheld the great waste of waters, flashing like a mirror in the sun. Jack should have greeted it as did the Hellens of Epami-

nondas, with a joyful cry of "Thalatta! Thalatta!" but he had forgotten his Greek, and was too weary to feel poetic.

At this stage of their journey, they met with many Indians, who here landed in order to proceed to the shrine of the opal. Dolores was much afraid of their secret being discovered, and even Jack was somewhat doubtful of the efficacy of the vow of silence; but, in this case, as in others, fanaticism proved their safeguard, for they passed unharmed, even unspoken to, through the mass of savages. On arriving at the verge of the sea, Jack at once sought out the cave described by Cocom; and, leading Dolores thereto, for a short space of time, they were in safety.

From this point, as Jack had learned in Totatzine, the city of Tlatonac was distant about twenty miles down the coast, and as there were plenty of canoes drawn up on the beach, it would have been easy for them to have proceeded at once on their journey. Gratitude to Cocom, however, prevented this, and they remained that night in the cave in order to await his arrival. The hiding-place was a natural cavern of wide extent, and, after making Dolores as

comfortable as he could, Jack retired to the entrance, and kept guard, lest they should be surprised by some wandering savage.

Throughout this perilous journey, nothing could exceed the tenderness and chivalry with which Duval behaved towards Dolores. He was tireless in his efforts to spare her all fatigues, in keeping up her spirits, in guarding her from all the annoyances consequent on travelling ill-provided through a dense forest. Dolores said nothing at the time, but took silent note of all this courtesy, and over and over again breathed a thankful prayer that the man whom she loved had proved himself so noble in the hour of danger. It was a disagreeable position to a girl brought up as she had been in strict observance of etiquette ; but Jack came triumphantly through the ordeal, and gained rather than lost in her eyes by the nobility of his character, by the rare delicacy of his behaviour.

The only thing that Duval feared was that the loss of the opal might cause the priests to mistrust Cocom's story, and send out word far and wide that the sacred gem had been torn from the temple. It

was true that they had gained a twelve hours' start, but, owing to the delicacy of Dolores' constitution, they had travelled very slowly to the coast, and at any moment messengers with news of the theft might arrive on the scene. In such an event, all the Indians on the coast would be examined as to whether a man and woman had passed seaward in company. Owing to their clothes being scattered in the gorge, the priests (supposing they did not trust these signs of death) would know they were disguised as Indians, therefore the dresses would avail them but little. Neither would the vow of silence be of much use, as in this crisis they would be questioned as to whom they were, to what tribe did they belong, and as neither of them could speak a word of Indian, the situation would become serious. The only hope, therefore, that they had of safety was of the arrival of Cocom without delay. If he arrived next morning, all would be well, if not, Jack discussed the advisability of taking a canoe, and proceeding at once to Tlatonac.

At dawn next morning they were both eating a hurried meal in the cave, and talking over the

advisability of making a retreat while it was yet time.

"As soon as they find out the opal is missing, the whole country will rise in arms," said Jack, emphatically ; "and every Indian will be questioned closely, both within and without the town."

"But the news won't reach the coast for some time, Juan."

"I question very much if it has not reached the coast now," replied Jack, a trifle drily. "From the end of that road are many other paths to the coast, so swift messengers might have passed us in that way. Let us hope, however, that this is not the case, and that Cocom will be the first to bring the news that the opal is lost."

"Cocom will guess that I have taken the opal!"

"Doubtless ; and the question is whether he will permit you to take it to Tlatonac."

"But why not, Juanito? I am the guardian of the opal. It is mine."

"Querida, you are wrong. It is the property of Huitzilopochtli. You are only its guardian—a mere honorary position that does not entail possession

of the stone. Its proper place, according to the Indian's superstition, is in the shrine of Totatzine."

"But Cocom is a Christian. He will not care about my taking it."

"Dios ! I am not so sure of that, Dolores. Cocom, by his own profession, was brought up an idolater, and old habits cling. It is true that he was converted by the good Padre, and I have no doubt his Catholicism is very fair—for an Indian. But if he does not worship the war-god, he at least believes in the prophetic quotations of the Opal ; and, thus believing, may resent it being taken from the shrine."

"Then I will say nothing about it."

"Useless, angelito ! Cocom knows that no other person than ourselves would dare to steal the Chalchuih Tlatonac. I was with him all the time, so he will know it cannot be me. Naturally enough, he will think it is you."

"And therefore betray us ?"

"No, I do not think he will do that. After all his trouble, it would be foolish of him to now play the traitor, for then his concurrence in our escape would become known, and get him into bad

odour with the priests. But it is possible that he might insist on your leaving the opal behind, to be sent back to Totatzine."

"No," cried Dolores, decisively; "I will rather throw it into the sea. Now that the gem is away from the shrine, those horrid priests may stop sacrificing men to the idol. Besides," she added, naively "it is mine."

"Ah! that is an all-sufficient reason," replied Duval, smiling. "Like all women, querida, you are fond of gems, and do not like to part with this one."

"It is very beautiful," sighed Dolores, taking the stone from her breast. "See how it glitters, Juanito Ah! what is that?"

A long, shrill whistle sounded outside the cave.

"Cocom!" cried Jack, starting to his feet. "Hide the opal for the present, Dolores."

It was indeed Cocom who entered. Cocom looking much older than usual, and quite worn out with his long journey from Totatzine. He saluted them gravely, and wrapping himself in his zarape crouched on the floor of the cave, with his eyes in-

tently fixed on them both. The expression of his face was as usual, and Jack was quite unable to decide whether he approved of or resented the rape of the shining precious stone.

"You look tired, Cocom," said Jack, passing him a flask of aguardiente. "Take a drink of this. It will do you good."

The old man greedily seized the flask, and drained it to the bottom. As it was more than half full Jack fully expected to see him fall helplessly intoxicated on the floor. But Cocom's head was seasoned to strong drink, and it only made him look younger, as though the aguardiente were a draught from the fountain of Youth.

"Have you it, Señorita?" he asked, fixing his beady eyes on Dolores.

"Yes," replied Dolores, off her guard. "That is, I——"

"Bueno!" said Cocom, nodding his head. "You have the opal. I am content."

Jack drew a long breath of relief. Cocom's sympathy with the idolatry of his youth was not evidently strong enough to stir him into protest

against the gem being stolen. Or perhaps he deemed that Dolores had more right to it than Huitzilopochtli. At all events, he did not seem ill-pleased that she was now in possession of the celebrated stone.

"What say the priests, Cocom?" he asked anxiously.

"They are in despair, Señor, over the loss of the sacred stone."

"Do they know who has taken it?"

Cocom pointed one copper-coloured finger at Dolores.

"They knew that the Chalchuih Tlatonac is with the guardian; but they think that the guardian and you, Señor, are at the bottom of the cañon—in the bed of the torrent."

"Then your ruse was successful?"

"Yes, Señor! I strewed the clothes on the narrow path, and in the dawn awoke the town with my cries. Ixtlilxochitli, with his priests, came to inquire the trouble. I told them that you, Señor, had escaped. They, not guessing you had gone by the secret way, thought you had fled alone by the cañon. The narrow

way was examined, your clothes were found, the blood on the cliffs, the clothes of Doña Dolores. Then they knew she had fled with you, and deemed both had fallen in the darkness over the cliff into the torrent.

"And the Chalchuih Tlatonac?" asked Dolores, breathlessly.

"They discovered that loss on returning to the teocalli for the morning sacrifice. All the priests were in despair, and Ixtlilxochitli, knowing you had taken the sacred gem, Señor, burnt a lock of your hair to——"

"A lock of my hair!" interrupted Jack, in surprise; "how did they get that?"

"Some of your hair was cut off when you were ill, and preserved in the temple."

"And why did they burn it?"

"Because, by doing so, they devote your soul to Tlacatecolotl, the evil one."

"Oh, the Aztec devil," replied Duval, carelessly. "Much good that will do them. I should have thought it wiser for them to look for the stone."

"They are looking for it, Señor, and for your body—in the bed of the torrent."

"I'm afraid they will be disappointed with the result of their search. So they think we are dead?"

"Yes, Señor. You are safe from pursuit; but I am not."

"What do you mean?"

Cocom withdrew his left arm from the fold of his zarape. The hand was cut off, and nothing remained but the stump of the wrist, seared with hot-iron. A hideous object. Dolores cried out, and hid her face in her hands with a shudder. Jack at once understood why Cocom had acquiesced so calmly in the theft of the opal.

"Behold, Señor!" said the old man, shaking the mutilated wrist at Jack, with a look of hatred; "this was my punishment for suffering you to escape. My hand was cut off before Huitzilopochtli, and burned with red-hot iron. Then I was shut up in prison, to wait till the god's will was known."

"My poor Cocom!" cried Jack, much distressed, "how you have suffered for aiding us. Thank Heaven you have escaped!"

"Yes, Señor. Ixtlilxochitli did not think I could leave the city; but in the night I got out of the

window of my prison, and followed you down the secret way. With all my strength I followed, but I feel sure that the hounds of the priests are on my track."

"But as Ixtlilxochitli knows you are not aware of the secret way, he——"

"Señor," interrupted Cocom, vehemently, "he must know it now. After the discovery of the cañon, guards were placed there. I have left the city. One other way only could I have gone—the secret way. Believe me, Señor, the Indians are not far behind."

"Dios!" cried Dolores, in terror, "we will be discovered!"

"Not so, Señorita! On my way hither, I met a friend coming from Tlatonac to the shrine. He told me that the boat of the Americano had gone some days since to Acauhtzin, to demand the release of Don Juan. She returns to-day, and will pass this point at noon. There is a canoe below, Señor! Let us depart in that canoe, and meet the steamer."

Jack sprang to his feet, with a shout, at this prospect of deliverance.

"Philip's yacht," he cried, joyfully; "good! We

will do as you say, at once, Cocom, and cut across the line of her passage. She will be sure to pick us up."

"Not now, Señor! At noon!"

Jack went to the entrance of the cave, and looked at the altitude of the sun.

"It wants two hours to noon. In one hour we will start."

"Bueno!" replied Cocom, stolidly, "let us hope the hounds of Ixtlilxochitli will not find us. Once we see the boat of the Señor Americano, and we are safe, if not——"

Cocom shook his head to intimate he had grave doubts of what would be their fate in such an event, and took another drink of aguardiente. Jack knew that in returning Philip would keep the yacht close to the shore, in order to avoid the war-ships of Xuarez, which generally kept a long way to seaward. He, therefore, took up his station at the mouth of the cave, and watched the northern horizon for the first trail of smoke from the yacht's funnel.

As in most tropical countries, towards the middle of the day all sounds of life ceased, and Nature took her siesta. In the hush, the three people in the cave heard

far away a wild cry. Cocom sprang to his feet, and hurried to the entrance to lay his hand on Jack's arm.

"Ixtilxochitli's hounds! Let us get away at once. Quick, Señor! We will start now."

"And be safe," cried Jack, excitedly, pointing towards the horizon; "yonder is the yacht!"

There was a speck on the horizon, but they had no time to look at it. The cries of the Indians sounded nearer and nearer. Guided by Cocom, they left the cave and rushed down a steep road to the beach. Hastily selecting a large canoe, Cocom sprang in. Jack lifted Dolores over the gunwale, and stepping in himself, pushed quickly off. Just as they got her afloat, a crowd of Indians burst out of the woods, and made for the beach. With keen eyes they had distinguished Cocom as the fugitive whom they were after, and fearful of losing their prey, poured down in a tumultuous mass. A shower of arrows fell around them, but luckily did no damage, save one which grazed Jack's cheek. In another moment, they were in deep water, paddling quickly from the shore.

The Indians at once seized the remaining boats, of which there were about a dozen, and hurriedly em-

barked. Impelled by powerful arms, these boats shot out after the fugitives with great rapidity. Jack turned his head to look for the yacht. She was steaming southward with great speed. With the strength of despair, Jack paddled, and so did Dolores. Cocom was but little use with his mutilated hand, but stood up in the bow cursing their pursuers fluently in the Indian tongue.

From the start, they had gained considerably on their pursuers, and fortunately an accident happened, by which three of the canoes, coming into collision, were overturned. The screams and cries of those struggling in the water caused their comrades to pause, and during a few minutes Jack succeeded in placing a longer distance between himself and his pursuers. *The Bohemian* was so near that he could see the Union Jack flying at her masthead, the foam swirling from her bows.

With wild yells to encourage one another, the remaining canoes started again; but, their folly in keeping close together in a mass, impeded their own speed. A good distance stretched between the pursuers and pursued. Cocom stood swearing

fluently, Dolores prayed loudly in Spanish, but Jack, with teeth set hard, paddled as though the devil were after him. To lose all when within sight of safety, it would be too terrible ; and as he forced the boat along, he kept glancing over his shoulder to look at the course of the yacht. She was standing closer in to shore, and the canoe would cut across her trail in ten minutes or thereabouts.

Those on board had evidently seen a boat was being chased by the Indians, for the sound of a gun broke on their ears.

“ Hurrah ! ” yelled Jack, joyfully. “ Philip sees us. Come on, you cursed wretches, I’ll escape you yet.”

Dolores flung down her paddle with a cry. She was completely worn out, and could do no more. Jack did what he could, but the Indians rapidly gained on them. A second gun announced that the yacht was close at hand. So were the Indians now within bow shot. Already some were fitting the arrows to the strings. An idea struck Jack which promised to be their salvation.

“ Dolores, the opal ! the opal ! Hold it up. They dare not fire then.”

She caught his meaning at once, and as the nearest boat drew on, sprang to her feet and held up the great gem. It flashed and sparkled in the sun, and a cry of wonder burst from the lips of their pursuers. The foremost warriors dropped their bows. They recognised the Chalchuih Tlatonac, and superstition, stronger than anything else in their natures, paralysed their arms.

“Señor, the boat!” cried Cocom, joyfully.

Jack turned his head. *The Bohemian* was less, much less, than a quarter of a mile away. Seeing this, the Indians, while forbearing to shoot, made redoubled efforts to catch them before the yacht came up, and thus recover the sacred gem. One boat came within two lengths, when Jack, thinking to dodge and gain time, turned his light craft off to the right. In another two minutes a ball ricocheted across the waves and smashed the foremost boat to pieces. Awestruck at this unexpected event, the others stopped paddling, and in a few minutes the canoe was safe under the bows of the yacht. Philip, Peter, and Rafael were looking over the side at the—as they thought—Indians.

“ Philip! Philip!”

“ Why! God! It’s Jack!”

“ Dolores! Take Dolores on board first,” murmured Jack; then, overcome by all he had passed through, fell back in a faint.

CHAPTER X.

FORTUNE TURNS HER WHEEL.

Frown, Fortune, frown,
 For I am much cast down,
 And tears do melancholy make my face ;
 In sable gown,
 With sad yew-wreath as crown,
 I rail at you,
 Oh, Fortune, most untrue,
 For that to me, you show not any grace ;
 Oh, la ! fa ! la ! la !
 My Lady Fortune, hear my sigh,
 Be kinder to my love and I.

 Smile, Fortune, smile,
 For I am gay awhile,
 And laughter lurks about these lips again ;
 Now I beguile
 My days with cheerful wile,
 For from the throng,
 Of shepherds gay and strong,
 My love hath chosen me to be her swain ;
 Oh, la ! fa ! la ! la !
 My Lady Fortune hear my cry,
 How happy are my love and I.

"BARON MUNCHAUSEN!" said Philip, addressing Jack, with mock solemnity, "this story of thine passeth the comprehension of man. 'Tis a most

rare history, and, were I the Commander of the Faithful, I would have it written in letters of gold on purple parchment."

It was some hours after their rescue by Philip, and *The Bohemian* was just entering the harbour of Tlatonac. Dolores was sound asleep in Peter's cabin; and Jack, now transformed to a civilised being, by washing and clothing, was seated in the state-room, narrating his adventures to an attentive audience of three. As for Cocom, he was squatting on the floor with a cigarette in his mouth, grunting approval of Jack's story—which he told in Spanish, for the benefit of Rafael, and modestly receiving the encomiums lavished on him by the listeners. Philip and Don Rafael frequently interrupted him with exclamations of surprise; but Peter, less skilful in understanding the Castilian tongue, had to keep his attention fixed on every word that fell from Jack's lips. Under the tutorship of Doña Serafina, the little doctor had made wonderful progress, and now understood the Spanish language fairly well. It was at the conclusion of this most extraordinary story that Philip addressed Jack as "Baron Munchausen."

"Por todos Santos!" exclaimed Rafael, admiringly, following Philip's example, "it is wonderful. Mi amigo! I can never thank you sufficiently for all you have done for my cousin. But, perchance," added the young captain, with a twinkle in his eye, "Dolores has already thanked you herself."

"Dolores will thank me when we arrive at Tlatonac," retorted Jack, sipping his wine. "Our circumstances were too perilous, Rafael, to admit of fine compliments."

"Don Miguel will be pleased!" remarked Peter, in fair Spanish.

"He will be more than pleased, Don Pedro," cried Rafael, seizing Jack's hand. "My friend, for this you have done, I feel sure my father will grant you the desire of your heart."

"Santissima! Let Dolores marry an Americano?"

"And why not, Señor? You have saved her life."

"Assuredly! But Cocom saved mine, Rafael!"

"For that Cocom shall pass the rest of his days in peace and comfort," said Philip, looking gratefully at the Indian.

Cocom shook his head with mournful composure.

"The days of Cocom are numbered, Señores. The Doña Dolores showed the opal to the hounds of Ixtlilxochitli. By that they knew that the victim of the cycle, that the guardian of the Chalchuih Tlatonac still live, and have stolen the sacred stone. Cocom aided them to discover the secret way, and Ixtlilxochitli will never forgive that betrayal. I am lost, Señores. I shall die."

"Es verdad!" exclaimed Rafael, earnestly, "doubtless the Indians of Totatzine will try and kill you, Cocom. But in Tlatonac, under the protection of the opal flag, you are safe!"

"No, Señor Maraquando! I shall die," repeated Cocom, stolidly.

"Not you!" interposed Jack, patting the old man on the head. "I shall look after you, my friend. You saved my life; I shall save yours. A fair exchange! Hark! a gun!"

"It is from the fort," said Philip, hastily rising, "we are now in the harbour. Come on deck, Jack. We shall be on shore in another twenty minutes."

They at once went up, and Jack took off his hat with a reverential expression, when he saw the silvery

walls of Tlatonac once more glisten over the blue waters.

"Thank God, who has preserved us through many perils!"

"Amen!" said Philip's deep voice, behind him "Oh, Jack," he added, placing his hand on his friend's shoulder, with deep emotion, "if you only knew what agonies we have undergone, thinking of your fate. When we found you were missing, I wished to go back, at any risk, and headed the yacht for the harbour of Acauhtzin. But that cursed Xuarez turned his guns on us, and, as *The Bohemian* would have been smashed to pieces, we were forced to retreat. What a cur I felt then."

"You could not help it," said Jack, patting Philip's back, kindly. "In an attempt to rescue me, you would only have lost your own lives."

"I did what I could, Jack. At once I came back to Tlatonac, and implored Don Francisco to send an army to Acauhtzin to your rescue. But it was impossible—the torpederas had not arrived, and there were only some merchant-ships to take men northward. Defended, as Acauhtzin was, by the war-ships,

such an attempt would have been foolhardy. We were forced to remain inactive at Tlatonac, not knowing if you were dead or alive."

"And then the war broke out?"

"As I told you; Don Hypolito, with his war-ship, is now besieging Janjalla. Tim, Garibay, General Ggedo, and half the army, are there defending it. Tim wanted to remain and search for you; but I insisted on his going, and told him I would take *The Bohemian* up to Acauhtzin, under the Union Jack, to make inquiries."

"It was lucky you did that," said Jack, with a grim smile, "or those Indians would have killed or recaptured us for sure."

"We did not know it was you," interposed Peter, who had been listening,—they were conversing in English. "I saw you first, and thought it was only a canoe of Indians being chased by others. Philip thought he would help the supposed Indians, and fired those guns."

"Peter nearly fainted when we saw who the Indians were," laughed Philip, slipping his arm within that of Jack's. "However, 'all's well that ends

well ;' and here you are, safe and sound with Dolores."

"And with the opal!"

"Good! I never thought you would have got that stone, Jack. Your luck holds, old fellow. The possession of the opal will give confidence to Tlatonac. Will it not, Rafael?"

"What say you, Señor Felipe?"

"The opal! Its possession will inspire confidence."

"Of a certainty, mi amigo. Our men will fight like devils, now they know the fortune of the Chalchuih Tlatonac is on the side of the Junta. In the same way, Don Hypolito's soldiers will lose heart."

"If they lose the war, that is all I care about. I would like to see that fiend of a Xuarez punished," said Jack, savagely. "By the way, Philip, I suppose you got no satisfaction at Acauhtzin this trip?"

"No; the forts opened fire, and would not let me enter the harbour. Luckily, the war-ships were all south, as I knew, or we would have been smashed up."

"The war-ships are bombarding Janjalla, you told me."

"Yes ; we hope, however, that it will hold out till the torpederas go south."

"Have they arrived ? "

"Yonder."

Philip pointed to the left, and there, under the walls of the fort, lay two long black objects, with stumpy black funnels. More than this, a large ship of some two thousand five hundred tons was anchored close at hand. Jack was astonished to see the change in the port since he had last beheld Tlatonac. Then it was quiet and peaceful-looking, now, what with ships and the two torpedo-boats, black wasps of the ocean, as they were, lying under the walls, the walls themselves spotted with the muzzles of heavy guns, the glitter of arms and uniforms outside the sea-gate, and the blaring of distant trumpets, the roll of drums, the aspect was of the most warlike character. He glanced at the spiteful-looking torpedo-boats, and turning towards Philip, mutely demanded an explanation.

"You see Cholocaca is in the thick of it," said the baronet, gaily. "You have been away close on three weeks, and during that time neither Don Hypolito nor the Junta have been idle. The former has sent his

troops and war-ships to Janjalla, and the latter is busy fixing up the torpederas to have a fight with *The Pizarro* and her consorts down south."

"But that ship?"

"*The Iturbide*. She is a Cuban mail steamer requisitioned by the Junta, and turned into an armed cruiser for this war. With her and the torpederas, Don Hypolito's fleet won't have such a pleasant time as they think."

"Does Don Rafael command *The Iturbide*?"

"I, mi amigo!" cried Rafael, overhearing this question. "Not I. Yonder torpedo-boat is under my charge, and in that, Don Juan, you must come with me."

"When do you go south?"

"The day after to-morrow. At the same time regiments march by land to Ggedo, at Janjalla. Oh, the game has begun, Juan, and the opal burns red!"

"It will now burn whatever colour we like," retorted Jack, shrugging his shoulders. "I saw the way those priests managed the trick. It was——"

"Tim can tell us all that in the patio of Casa Maraquando," interrupted Philip, hastily. "See, the

anchor is down, so we had better go ashore at once, and relieve the minds of Don Miguel and the ladies."

"Cocom is already over the side," said Peter, pointing to a small canoe skimming the waves. "You will receive an ovation on your way through the city."

"Greatness is thrust upon me," laughed Jack, who was wonderfully lighthearted now that they were safe, "Where is Doña Dolores?"

"Just coming on deck."

The girl still wore her Indian dress, as Philip, being a bachelor, had no feminine gear on board. She had, however, washed the paint from her face, and looked wonderfully bright and charming in her savage toilette.

"Pocahontas!" said Philip, in Jack's ear, as she approached. "Lucky man. I would I were Captain John Smith."

"What about Eulalia?"

"Oh, I can tell you about Eulalia," murmured Dr. Grench, a trifle maliciously.

"You'll do nothing of the sort, Peter," said Philip, sharply. "I will tell Jack all about it myself. You stick to your beetles and Doña Serafina."

"Doña Serafina!" cried Dolores, overhearing the name. "Oh, Señor Felipe, how I do wish to see my dear aunt."

"In a few minutes, Señorita. See, the boat is waiting. We will all go on shore at once."

"There seems to be a row on shore," remarked Jack, as they climbed down the side of the yacht.

"Dios!" exclaimed Rafael, laughing. "Cocom has told them all. The news is passing from mouth to mouth. Soon it will be all over the city. Harken to the cries, mis amigos."

"Vive el Americano! El opalo! Dios lo pague, Doña Dolores!"

"A shout for one, a shout for all," observed Jack, philosophically. "They should also shout, 'God reward Cocom!' for without Him we would not be here."

They were welcomed on shore by a frantic crowd. The Cholocacans have all the vivacity and impulsiveness of southern nature. Nothing do they love so much as a public demonstration; therefore, on this occasion they gave full rein to their enthusiasm. In their eyes, Jack was a hero, Dolores a heroine, and, accordingly,

they were almost stunned with vociferous applause. The fact that the opal, that sacred gem, so inextricably interwoven with the traditions of the Republic, was now in the city itself, wrought them up to a pitch of frenzy. With the Chalchuih Tlatonac in their midst, they could not fail to conquer the rebels ; it was the palladium of the Republic, the genius of Tlatonac, and by it would they be enabled to overwhelm their enemies. The superstitious belief they had in the jewel was almost terrible. It glittered on the banners of Cholacaca, it coloured the whole patriotic feelings of the inhabitants. The opal meant victory to its possessors, and, lo ! they held it safely in the capital.

Up to the sea-gate the lovers passed, surrounded by their friends. On either side the vast crowd heaved like a great sea. Constant cries saluted Jack, Dolores, the opal ; and to show the public that Cocom had spoken truly, Duval whispered a few words to his companion. In a moment she had drawn forth the gem from her breast, and held it up in full sight of the populace. The tumult sank to a dead stillness, as if by magic, and everyone drew a deep breath of

awe and admiration as the splendid jewel flashed its lightnings in the sun. A crimson beam flared forth, owing to the position in which it was held by Dolores. It burned in her fingers like a red-hot coal. The crowd, in their superstition, took it as a sign from heaven, and burst out into frenzied cries.

“Guerra! Guerra! El opalo! Guerra! Abajo los rebeledes!”

Then some excited person began chanting the national song of the opal. In a moment the mob caught at the idea, and the great body of sound thundered to the sky.

Kneel at the shrine while the future discerning,
See how the crimson ray strengthens and glows;
Red as the sunset the opal is burning,
Red is prophetic of death to our foes.

“I feel like a victorious general,” said Jack, smiling at all this enthusiasm.

“What a pity Tim isn’t here,” remarked Peter, whose usually meek eyes were flashing like stars behind his spectacles; “he does so like a row.”

“He’ll be having plenty where he is,” said Philip, grimly; “but look at that fellow going to do the Raleigh business with his zarape.”

By this time they had passed into the Calle Otumba, and a frantic young Spaniard, rushing forward, flung his cloak on the ground for Dolores to walk across. The idea pleased the people, and in a few moments the whole way up to the Casa Maraquando was spread with zarapes. Then flowers were flung before, them in profusion.

"The primrose path of dalliance," quoth Philip, laughing. "I hope these excited people won't throw their bodies next for us to walk over. Don't be afraid, Doña Dolores. You have your guard of honour to protect you."

Indeed, this frenzied demonstration rather scared the girl. All the colour faded out of her face, and slipping the opal into her bosom, she shrank terrified against her lover. Jack took her arm within his own and his touch gave her more confidence; but what with the singing, shouting, cloak-flinging, flower throwing, and what not, they both felt quite worn out, and were not at all sorry to at length arrive at the door of the Casa Maraquando.

The news of their arrival had preceded them, as a matter of course, and Don Miguel, with outstretched

arms, was waiting in the gateway to receive them. Dolores, with a cry of delight, flung herself on the breast of her uncle, who at once carried her into the patio. Then the rest of the party followed, and the doors were shut against the mob, which still remained in the street, terribly excited. After a time, the tumult quietened down like a sea after a storm, and the throng streamed into the Plaza de los Hombres Ilustres to organise a demonstration to the honour and glory of the Chalchuih Tlatonac and its guardian.

In the patio, Dolores was received with noisy demonstrations by Doña Serafina, and with joyful tears by Eulalia. It was some time, however, before Don Miguel could part from his niece, for he held her to his breast, calling upon all the saints to shower blessings on her head. Never had the stately Spaniard been so moved, and when he delivered his niece over to the tender embraces of Serafina and Eulalia, he turned towards Jack, with tears in his eyes.

"Señor Juan," he said, in a voice of emotion, grasping the young man's hand, "I can never repay

you for what you have done. From this moment you may command the services, and the lives of myself and those dear to me."

He could say no more, but, with a wave of his hand, walked to the other end of the court to conceal his emotion. Jack was scarcely less moved, and as for Dolores, she was being overwhelmed by her cousin and aunt.

"Dear one," chattered the old lady, noisily ; "now that thou art safe, I vow twenty candles to the Virgin, who has thus watched over thee, and to San Juan, who is the patron saint of your preserver."

"I, also !" cried Eulalia, who had in some mysterious way become possessed of the history. "I vow a jewel to San Felipe, for it was his namesake who preserved them from the Indians."

Jack and Philip were much gratified by these marks of attention ; but Peter, being left out in the cold, was inclined to be cross.

"They might vow a candle or so to San Pedro," he grumbled, "seeing the whole Church of Rome is under his care."

"Offer him some beetles, Peter," said Jack, in the

little doctor's ear ; but the suggestion was not received favourably by the entomologist.

Having wept and cried over Dolores to their hearts' content, the ladies proceeded to lead her away to resume her own dress ; but before doing so, both aunt and niece flung themselves on Jack's neck, and embraced him with fervour. Duval did not mind a kiss from Eulalia, but he objected to the aunt. Nevertheless, as he had to take the bitter with the sweet, he passively submitted to be made much of.

"Caro, Señor ! You are an angel from heaven," cried Serafina, with fervour.

"As valiant as the Cid," said Eulalia, kissing Jack's bronzed cheek.

"We will pray for you to the saints."

Your face shall be in my soul !"

This last remark came from Eulalia, whereat Philip winced. Seeing this, Jack brought the duet to a speedy end.

"I am your servant, Señoritas ! What I have done is nothing, and thanks are rather due to Cocom than to me."

"But without you, Don Juan, Cocom could not have saved Dolores."

"And without the boat of Señor Felipe," added Eulalia, glancing at the baronet, "none of the three would be here."

Philip made a polite gesture of dissent, though in his heart he was glad that Eulalia inclined so kindly towards him. Then Jack kissed the hands of the ladies in a most gallant fashion, and they, after removing Dolores once more from the arms of Don Miguel, whither she had flown, led her out of the patio. This being done, while waiting for the evening meal, Don Miguel demanded from Jack an account of his adventures, a request which was at once seconded by Philip, Rafael, and Peter, who protested that they could listen to a dozen repetitions of his hairbreadth escapes. Thus adjured, Jack, with as much suppression of himself as possible, narrated the events which had taken place from the earliest period of his capture by Xuarez down to the present time when he was rescued by Philip. Frequently the story was interrupted by ejaculations from his auditors, and by the time the story was finished they

were all furious with Don Hypolito, particularly Señor Maraquando.

"To think, Señor," he cried, indignantly, "that I have touched the hand of that man. Carambo! To give up a white man to the cursed altar of Huitzilopochtli. It is infamous! It is unheard of!"

"But you forget, Señor, he is a pure-blooded Indian."

"I ever thought so," said Rafael, sagely. "There were many ways about Xuarez, my father, that were not those of a Spaniard."

"Indian or no Indian," growled Philip, clenching his fist, "if I get within striking distance of the scoundrel, I won't leave a whole bone in his body."

"Nor will I," said the meek Peter, fiercely, "fancy him wanting to lay Jack out on a jasper stone like a corpse on a dissecting-table."

"Be quiet, you Chamber of Horrors," said the baronet, angrily, "don't mention such a thing."

"There is one great good gained out of much evil," observed Don Miguel, reflectively; "the possession of the opal strengthens us greatly against Xuarez."

"How so?" asked Philip, curiously.

"Because this priest, Ixtlilxochitli, will not be able to manage the Indians for him without the stone."

"I am afraid, Señor, the mischief is done," said Jack, gravely, "the opal declared war, and now the Indians will join Don Hypolito."

"It's a pity we can't get up a counter prophecy, and make the opal declare peace," remarked Philip, quietly ; "then the Indians would take no part in the war."

"I fancy that is impossible," said Miguel, shaking his head. "I would it could be so. If the Indians would only keep quiet, Xuarez would find great difficulty in accomplishing his plans. Should Janjalla fall, and Xuarez concentrate his own men and the Indians before Tlatonac, it will be hard to beat them back."

"Janjalla will not fall," cried Rafael, in a fiery tone ; "there are brave men defending it. They will hold out till reinforced. The regiments march southward to-morrow, the torpederas and *The Iturbide* go the next day ; and between the two we shall conquer these rebels."

"We will try, at all events, my son," said Mara-

quando, smiling at the young man's enthusiasm ; " but, meanwhile, it is best to look on both sides of the question."

" With the opal stone in Tlatonac, we cannot fail," declared Jack. " You have seen it, Señor Maraquando?"

" Not yet. Dolores was too agitated to show it to me."

" Here is my cousin," said Rafael, rising to his feet. " She brings the opal with her."

Before he finished the sentence, Dolores, now arrayed in her European dress, entered the patio, followed by Doña Serafina and Eulalia uttering cries of admiration. In her hand she carried the Harlequin Opal, which glittered faintly in the dim light.

" See, uncle!" cried Dolores, placing the gem in Maraquando's hand, " I give you the luck of Tlatonac."

" So this is the famous stone?" said Miguel, gazing at the wonderful play of colours, " I do not wonder it is held sacred. So beautiful a jewel I have never yet beheld."

" There, Señor Maraquando, I disagree with you,"

observed Jack, in a nervous voice ; " there is a jewel still more beautiful in my eyes—Dolores ! "

Don Miguel started and stared in amazement at the young couple, who were now standing hand in hand before him. He could not understand the meaning of either the attitude or speech.

" My brother," whispered Serafina, seizing the situation with feminine quickness, " it is love ! "

" Yes," said Jack, firmly, " it is love. I have worshipped your niece these many months, Señor Maraquando, but I dared not to tell you of that love, seeing I was an Englishman, a heretic. Now, however, if I have done anything to deserve your gratitude, I ask you, in the presence of my friends, to give your consent to the marriage of Dolores and myself."

Don Miguel was silent for a few moments, and then turned slowly towards his niece.

" Do you love Don Juan, Dolores ? "

She raised her head and looked not at her questioner, but at Jack.

" Yes," she replied simply, " I have loved him this long time."

" Señor," said Maraquando, with great dignity, " it

is true you are not of our race ; but during the time I have known you I have seen nothing in you but what I admire and respect. In rescuing my niece from the Shrine of the Opal at Totatzine, you have acted like a chivalrous gentleman. To your marriage I gladly give my consent. Take Dolores as your wife, Señor, and with her this."

He held out for Jack's acceptance the Harlequin Opal.

CHAPTER XI.

AWAY TO THE FRONT.

One kiss ! 'tis our last one ; the horses await,
 And swift through the midnight I ride to my fate.
 'Tis life for thy lover, or death it may be,
 But living or dying, my thought is for thee.
 Who knows when my arms shall enfold thee again
 The future hides ever its joy and its pain.
 I leave thee for battle, my dear one, my bride,
 And on, through the darkness, I ride, and I ride.
 Light hand on the bridle, light heart in my breast,
 A bunch of your ribbons flaunt gay on my crest.
 I go not in sorrow, but hasten with glee,
 To fight for my country, my honour, and thee.
 Soon wilt thou in triumph behold me, my sweet,
 Return with my laurels to cast at thy feet.
 I dream of a future with thee by my side,
 As on, through the darkness, I ride, and I ride.

JACK'S position was now similar to that of Tantalus.
 Love was within his reach, yet he dared not to grasp
 it, for on the next day he was to depart with Don
 Rafael for Janjalla, in the torpedera *Montezuma*. Peter
 had also been invited to visit the seat of war, and

although a man of peace, decided to go, as he was anxious about Tim. That redoubtable warrior was at Janjalla, with General Ggedo, busily engaged in wiring sensational accounts of the siege to *The Morning Planet*. Tim was particularly anxious that Janjalla should not fall into the hands of Don Hypolito, as it was the spot whence started the telegraph-wires for the south. If Xuarez captured the town, the forces of the Junta would be driven back to Tlatonac, and as likely as not the wires would be cut by the rebels, therefore Tim would be unable to transmit news to England. As it was, he made good use of his time, and took full possession of the telegraph-office in Janjalla.

As to Philip, he decided to march by land with the Regimiento de los Caballeros, of which corps he was now an officer. Colonel Garibay, the commander of the regiment, was already at Janjalla, having been sent there by President Gomez on a special message to General Ggedo. The regiment was, therefore, under the command of Captain Velez, who was a great admirer of Philip, and made much of him. Altogether reinforcements amounting to close on a

thousand men were now on their way south, to assist General Gigedo in holding Janjalla, and the torpederas, in company with the armed cruiser *Iturbide*, were to proceed there by sea, in order to destroy, if possible, the three ships of the enemy now bombarding the town.

There was no doubt that the war had begun badly for the Junta, but this was the fault of President Gomez. A more obstinate man never existed, and having made up his mind that Xuarez would attack Tlatonac without delay, he had foolishly withdrawn the garrison from Janjalla, Puebla de los Naranjos, Chichimec, and other towns, for the protection of the capital. It was in vain that Don Miguel, warned by his son, represented that it was more than probable Xuarez would attack Janjalla first, in order to concentrate his troops in the south, and so march them across the plains to Tlatonac. The President refused to take this view of the matter, and by the withdrawal of the garrisons, left the whole of Southern Cholocaca in an unprotected condition.

The effect of this policy was most disastrous. Warned by his spies that but a feeble defence could

be offered by Janjalla, Don Hypolito sent southward, without delay, transports filled with troops, and a convoy of the three war-ships. He hoped to capture and garrison Janjalla with his own men before the Junta became aware of his design, and thus secure an important town as the basis of his operations. At Acauhtzin he was hemmed in by mountains, unable to march his troops overland to the capital; but in the south, between Janjalla and Tlatonac were vast alluvial plains, over which he could lead his army. It was his intention to effect a conjunction with the Forest Indians before the walls of the Opal City, and having ordered his war-ships to bombard it by sea, thus attack the capital on two sides at once. Between two fires, he deemed that the city would speedily yield.

Becoming aware that the war-ships had gone south, Don Francisco speedily saw how foolishly he had acted, and ordered five hundred men to at once proceed to Janjalla, to defend it against the rebels. He sent back the troops to garrison the inland towns, and thus hoped to stretch a barrier between the rebels and the capital. The whole

danger lay in the south, for as yet the Indians were quiet, and no rising was apprehended on their part, though Jack was doubtful as to the advisability of trusting to appearances. He quite believed that the campaign would be conducted by Xuarez, as had been prophesied by Don Rafael, and could not help deploring that such an incompetent man as Gomez was at the head of affairs.

"If he would only leave things alone, and not interfere," he said to Philip, on the eve of departure. "His generals know more about warfare than he does. The man's an ass."

"I'm with you there," replied Philip, heartily; "he has made a muddle of things already. Who but an ass would send only five hundred men to Janjalla, when it is about to be bombarded by three men-of-war, and attacked by two thousand rebel troops? Even this reinforcement is not strong enough. Sending his troops southward in these dribblets will end in their being cut to pieces. I would not be surprised if even now Xuarez was in possession of Janjalla, and, with such a basis for operations, he will make it hot for the Republic."

"What do you think ought to have been done?"

"I was speaking to Colonel Garibay, and we both came to the same conclusion. Don Francisco ought to have taken the warning of Rafael, and concentrated most of the troops at Janjalla. The capital is well defended by its forts, and can look after itself. Janjalla, on the other hand, is in no fit state of defence to resist the heavy guns of three ships pounding at its walls. As I take it, the great aim should be to prevent Don Hypolito from getting a footing in the south by capturing Janjalla. Then he would have nothing but the sea and Acauhtzin for a field of operations. In the north, owing to the mountains, he can do nothing, and now we have the torpederas, he cannot have it all his own way at sea."

"Well, and supposing he captures Janjalla?"

Philip shrugged his shoulders.

"The result is plain enough. Instead of mountains between this and Tlatonac, he has nothing but plains on which he can manœuvre his troops. He will either capture the intervening towns or seduce them to his cause. Then he will arrive at Tlatonac,

and while he is besieging it from the inland, his fleet will bombard it from the sea."

"That is if the torpederas don't sink his ships."

"Of course! I am talking of the campaign from Don Hypolito's point of view. But one thing is certain. If he captures Janjalla, this war may be prolonged for months. Think of the ruin that will mean to the country."

Philip spoke truly. Hitherto Cholocaca had enjoyed immunity from the horrors of war. From the year 1840, when under the leadership of Zuloaga, the Republic had thrown off the yoke of Spain, there had been peace for a period of forty-five years. Those fratricidal wars which constantly convulsed the communities of South America were not to be found in the history of Cholocaca. The Republic kept well within her borders, was at peace with her neighbours, and under the rule of wise rulers, devoted herself to improving her material condition.

It was true that a greater part of the country consisted of wild forests filled with unconquered Indians, but the Cholocacans had always been able to keep these savages at bay. The coast-line of

the north, the immense alluvial plains of the south, were thoroughly civilised, and covered with thriving towns. The two secondary capitals, Janjalla in the south, Acauhtzin in the north, looked up to and respected their powerful sister city, Tlatonac, who held her seat in the central portion of the sea-board. Yet it must be admitted that they bore a grudge against her, as nearly all the commerce of the country poured into her walls, from thence to be distributed over the civilised world. Why should Tlatonac be the capital when they were each equally suited for the post? They had rich countries behind them, they exported goods far and wide, they had their municipal institutions, their walls, ramparts, palaces, and magnificent churches. Why, therefore, should they be forced to send their ships to the port of Tlatonac, there to pay toll and custom duties? The Junta had constituted Tlatonac the starting-point of all vessels, and according to law, ships from the north and south were forced, both in going and coming, to report themselves at the capital. By this means Tlatonac dominated her sister cities, and held them firmly under her thumb.

The reason that Tlatonac was chosen to be the capital by Zuloaga was very plain. It was situated in the centre of the coast-line, and thus commanded equally the north and the south. It had been the shrine of the opal, and the traditions of that stone closely interwoven with the history of the country. Greatest reason of all, the harbour was the finest in Cholocaca. Moreover, roads from most of the inland towns diverged to the capital, thus rendering communication easy ; while Janjalla, environed by swamps, and Acauhtzin girdled by forests, were more or less shut off from the heart of the country. When inland traders could transport their goods to Tlatonac at half the cost they could take them to either of the other two towns, it was not likely, from a commercial point of view, that they would ever forsake the capital. Under the circumstances, it can well be seen that Gomez had good reason to doubt the fidelity of Janjalla. The northern town had, through jealousy of Tlatonac, sided with the rebels, and it was just possible that the southern city might follow suit. The only thing in favour of Janjalla remaining faithful was that while both towns were jealous of the capital, they were

equally jealous of one another. The populace of Janjalla knew well that if Xuarez conquered that he would transfer the seat of Government to Acauhtzin out of gratitude for its help, and would certainly not assist a cause calculated to elevate a rival city.

The Republic was very wealthy. She exported tobacco, coffee, cacao, cotton, rice, maize, and cattle. Her plains were covered with grain, her mountains were rich in ores, and her population extremely industrious. With the exception of the area covered by the forests, the whole country was cultivated, and now the formation of a railway through the forests, up to Acauhtzin promised the opening up of the northern lands. Already fifty miles of railway had pierced the enormous belt of timber lying between Acauhtzin and the capital. From the main line, branches were to extend to the different towns, so as to connect them with the seat of Government. Unfortunately, all this promise of prosperity was now interrupted by the war.

There was no doubt that Don Hypolito was a source of infinite trouble to the country. This Indian coming from the sacred city of Totatzine, was now

revenging himself on the descendants of the Conquistadores, for their treatment of his ancestors. He had no genuine cause for dissatisfaction, as at the time when he raised the standard of revolt, the country was thoroughly prosperous. The wealth gained by the exports of the Republic was used by her Presidents to open up the interior of the continent, and to supply Tlatonac with all the refinements of civilisation. The army was well drilled, well clothed, well armed. The walls of the city, were built on the most approved system of engineering science, the principal squares were lighted by electricity, millions had been expended on drainage, in the formation of interior roads, in the construction of the proposed railway to Acauhtzin. The Republic had even formed the nucleus of a navy, and had already three war-ships in hand, and two torpederas coming, when the war broke out.

Now the war-ships had revolted to Xuarez, the northern capital was bound to his cause, and this ambitious Indian, assuming the name and race of a Spaniard, had plunged the country into what promised to be a disastrous war. The effect was ruinous. Business was at a standstill, exports were stopped, the

capital was declared in a state of siege, and the whole country resounded with the tramp of armies, the clash of arms, the thunder of cannon. Industry was paralysed, and many of the country-people crowding to the capital, rendered food dear. To avoid the horrors of famine and ruin which threatened the Republic, it was absolutely necessary that Xuarez should be crushed at once.

President Gomez was now warrior certainly, but he was a judicious ruler—in time of peace. He saw at once the terrible calamities likely to ensue should the war be prolonged, and already regretted his folly in not taking the advice of Don Miguel. So far as was possible, he repaired his mistakes. A thousand men were sent to the relief of Janjalla by land, and *The Iturbide*, in company with the torpederas, left for the seat of war by sea. If the reinforcements could succour Janjalla in time, if the torpederas could sink the rebel ships, then there would be some hope of the war being brought to a speedy conclusion. But as it was, the whole danger lay in the probability of Don Hypolito capturing Janjalla, from whence he could threaten the capital and intervening towns.

Jack was very anxious that Philip should come with him in *The Montezuma*, but the baronet was obstinately set on going with his regiment.

"I shall be in Janjalla before you, Jack ; for between you and the town lie the war-ships, while we have but to march across those easy plains in safety."

"Yes, if the Indians don't stop you."

"Nonsense ; there is no chance of that."

"I am not so certain, Philip. Don Hypolito has his spies, as you know ; and when he hears that reinforcements are advancing southward, he will probably send word to Ixtlilxochitli to have them intercepted. As you know, the plains are fringed to the west by the forests, so the Indians could break out from thence, and perhaps exterminate the troops."

"What ! exterminate a thousand soldiers, armed with rifles ? Impossible !"

"Well, it does seem impossible. However, as you won't come with me, go as you please. We shall meet at Janjalla."

"Of course. I shall see you from the walls being chased, by *The Pizarro* and *The Cortes*."

They were talking in the patio of the Casa Mara-

quando, and Philip was tricked out in all the bravery of his uniform. He looked remarkably handsome and Eulalia sighed as she thought he was about to leave her. All coquetry had been laid aside, and she had confessed that she was deeply in love with the Americano. Philip fully returned her affection, and intended, on returning from Janjalla, to ask Don Miguel to permit them to be married on the same day as Jack and Dolores. Turning away from Jack, he caught sight of Eulalia's pensive face, and heard her plaintive little sigh. In an instant he was by her side.

"Querida," he whispered tenderly, "you must not be sad. I go forth to bring home laurels to lay at your feet."

"I would rather you were at my feet, Felipe," sobbed Eulalia. "This horrid war! I am sure you will be killed, and then I shall die. Oh yes, mi alma, I shall assuredly die."

They were standing in a secluded corner of the patio. Neither Don Miguel or Serafina were in sight, so Philip, taking advantage of the situation, kissed Eulalia once, twice, thrice. It was true Jack and

Dolores were not far off, but they were too busy with each other to take much notice. Eulalia sobbed on Philip's breast, vowed she would die if he left her, told him to march forth and be a hero at once, commanded him to remain at Tlatonac, ordered him to depart for Janjalla, and thus contradicting herself every moment, smiled and wept in turns. Finally, she produced a little gold cross.

"This is for thee, my own one," she whispered slipping it into his hand. "It has been blessed by Padre Ignatius. Nought can hurt thee while the sacred thing is on thy heart."

Philip kissed the cross, kissed Eulalia, and swore he would never part with it throughout the campaign. In the middle of their tender leave-taking, a trumpet pealed forth in the Plaza de los Hombres Ilustres. It was the signal for departure.

"I must go! Farewell, my dear one. Watch from the azotea, and let your face be the last thing I behold in Tlatonac."

"Adios, mi alma," murmured Eulalia, and embraced him fondly, after which, Philip, turning hastily away, shook hands with Jack, and kissed the hands of

Dolores and Serafina, the latter of whom had just entered the patio.

“Adieu, dear ladies. Good-bye, Jack. Take care of yourself, and don’t be carried off to any more Indian cities. We meet at Philippi. Adios!”

With a wave of his hand he was gone, and Jack escorted the ladies to the azotea to watch the regiments departing. The Plaza was crowded with soldiers and women, the latter taking tearful leave of those marching to the front. President Gomez, attended by a brilliant staff, among whom Jack saw Don Miguel and his son, made a speech full of fire and patriotism, which caused the utmost enthusiasm. Then the banners of the different regiments were unfurled, the bands began to play the March of Zuloaga, and the soldiers began to file out of the square by the Calle Otumba.

Regiment after regiment marched past, through streets wreathed with flowers, amid tears, cheers, and wavings of handkerchiefs. The house-tops were crowded with ladies looking down on the troops. They made a gallant show as they tramped along with waving plumes and glittering arms. The

cavalry soldiers came first, and those on the azotea of the Casa Maraquando saw Sir Philip riding by the side of Captain Velez, at the head of the Regimiento de los Caballeros. The banners streamed in the air, the horses champed their bits, and proudly pawed the earth, and, one vast rainbow of hues, this splendid body of men moved majestically past. Philip was riding with his drawn sword sloping over his shoulder, and as he passed the Casa Maraquando, looked up, and saluted the ladies. Eulalia hastily snatching a bunch of jasmine from her breast, let it drop when he was directly underneath. The baronet dexterously caught it, and pressing a kiss on the blossoms, fastened them in his jacket. In another minute or so, he disappeared round the corner of the street on the way to the Puerta de la Culebra, from whence the troops marched southward to Janjalla.

After the disappearance of Philip, Eulalia took no further interest in the proceedings of the day, and retired to her room, followed by Dolores, who strove to console her. Jack not caring for the sole companionship of Doña Serafina, excused himself on the plea that he wanted to ride after the troops

and give Philip a message to Tim. Doña Serafina graciously permitted him to depart, and he dashed out of the house, flung himself on his horse, which was waiting at the door, and was about to ride towards the Puerta de la Culebra when Don Rafael came riding at full speed out of the Plaza! The young man seemed much excited, and in his headlong rush knocked down two or three people, so crowded was the street. Never heeding their cries, he raced past Jack, waving his hand.

"To *The Montezuma*, mi amigo! News of the war-ships."

Anxious to know what fresh event had taken place, and fearful that Janjalla had fallen, Jack spurred his horse after Rafael, and at a break-neck speed they clattered down the street to the sea-gate scattering the crowd in every direction.

Outside the sea-gate, Rafael headed to the left, where the torpedera *Montezuma* was lying, and jumping off his horse, threw the reins to a peon, and called a boat. Jack followed his example, and in a few moments they were pulling for the torpedo-vessel.

"Carambo mi amigo!" said Jack, breathlessly, "you ride like the devil. What is the matter now?"

"His Excellency has just received news that two of the war-ships have returned to Acauhtzin."

"What! Have they given up the siege?"

"No. They are acting as convoy to the transports. Xuarez is sending more troops south, and, knowing that our torpederas are not ready, thinks that *The Pizarro*, single-handed, is sufficient to blockade Janjalla."

"Then he has landed his other troops?" said Jack, as they sprang on board *The Montezuma*. "The ship guns have evidently silenced the forts, and permitted the rebels to get on shore."

"Precisely! But what matter? Reinforcements are now on their way by land, and we, my friend, will start to-morrow by sea to smash up *The Pizarro*."

"Will the torpederas be ready?"

"They must be ready!" cried Rafael, stamping his foot. "We may never get such another chance. If we can only sink *The Pizarro*, it will dishearten the troops of Xuarez now besieging Janjalla, and they can be easily defeated."

"If we can manage that, it will be a sad blow to Don Hypolito!"

"Dios! so I should think," replied Rafael, laughing gaily. "He will come south with more troops, and find Janjalla occupied by us, and his way barred by two torpederas and *The Iturbide*. Then *The Pizarro's* loss won't please him. Carajo! no."

"Bueno! But you forget *The Pizarro* has search-lights, torpedo-netting——"

"Not the last, mi amigo!" interrupted Rafael quickly. "I told you before, the netting was left behind in Tlatonac when the war-ships left for Acauhtzin. As to the search-lights, she can keep them on *The Iturbide* or on the other torpedera. Then, my friend, *The Montezuma* will make things unpleasant for her."

"It's a mere chance, Rafael!"

"Quien sabe!" retorted the young man, shrugging his shoulders; "all warfare is mere chance. Come and look over the boat."

As the fittings of the torpederas were somewhat complicated, engineers had been sent out from England in charge, and these, being paid heavily by the Junta,

remained to manœuvre the boats. Among them Jack discovered a Scotchman, from Aberdeen, with whom he struck up a friendship. This gentleman, whose clan was Mackenzie, showed them all over the boat, and spoke in terms of great affection of the Whitehead torpedoes.

"Eh, mon!" he observed to Jack, as they surveyed those triumphs of modern warfare, "jouist gie her a shove, an' she'll smash the hail boatie to bits—into sma' bits."

"That is if the ship you propose to smash doesn't bring her heavy guns to bear on this boat."

"Hoots! hoots! mon. *The Montysumy* can gang her ain gait. Nineteen knots an hour! Ma certie, it wud tack a braw gun to catch the likes o' her."

When they returned on deck from their inspection of the ship, a note was brought to Rafael, from Captain Pedraza, of *The Iturbide*, requesting his presence on board. They dropped into a boat, and were speedily clambering up the giant sides of the cruiser. Being conducted to the state-room, they found Captain Pedraza, surrounded by his officers, reading a message from the President.

"Ola mis amigos!" cried the captain, gaily, "you are just in time. Señor Juan, I am your servant. Don Rafael, we leave Tlatonac for Janjalla to-morrow afternoon."

"Why in the afternoon?"

"Carambo. So as to reach Janjalla at night. *The Pizarro* is lying there in the harbour, and, under cover of darkness, we may be able to sink her either with our guns or by means of torpedoes."

"Will the torpederas be ready?" asked Jack, for the second time.

"You may be certain of that," said Rafael, significantly. "I will guarantee that *The Montezuma* will be able to start at the appointed time."

"And I can say the same of *The Zuloaga*," observed a slim man, in whom Jack recognised the commander of the other torpedo-boat. "I think, Señor, it can be looked on as certain that all three can depart."

After this a babel of talk ensued concerning the chances of surprising *The Pizarro*. Some proposed one place, some another, and amid all the excitement, Jack, growing weary of the arguing, slipped out of

the saloon, and went ashore, so as to have as much time as possible with Dolores before departure.

He strolled along the sea-shore, and met Cocom just outside the sea-gate. The old man saluted him gravely—

“Señor,” he said, mysteriously approaching Jack ; “beware of Ixtlilxochitli.”

“What do you mean, Cocom ?” asked Duval, rather startled.

“The Indians, Señor, are now on the war-path—to the south,” added Cocom, significantly.

“Great Heaven!” ejaculated the young man, horror-struck. “They intend to surprise the reinforcements.”

“That is so, Señor. But I, Cocom, have sent runners after them to warn the Señors.”

“Bueno ! Cocom, you are the safeguard of Cholacaca !”

“Not I, Señor ; but the Chalchuih Tlatonac !”

“Oh, I haven’t much belief in that.”

“Don Juan !” said Cocom, significantly ; “the Indians obeyed the stone implicitly—it is sacred. What it speaks they do. Red is burned and war

was proclaimed. But, Señor, if it flamed blue, then would the Indians be at peace."

Before Jack could say a word, Cocom mysteriously slipped away, leaving the young man sorely puzzled as to his meaning.

"That confounded opal," he said, as he resumed his way towards the Casa Maraquando, "it meets one at every turn. They say opals are unlucky, and certainly the Chalchuih Tlatonac has not brought much luck to us as yet."

CHAPTER XII.

A NAVAL ENGAGEMENT—NEW STYLE.

“Wot ! fightin’ ?” said the sailor man to me
 (He was wooden-legged and close on eighty-three).
 “Why, bless ’ee, sir, who knows what fightin’ are,
 When iron pots is classed as men-of-war,
 And kittles sail the sea without a spar?
 Such wessels were not seen at Trafalgar.”

“Old Nelson !” said the sailor man to me
 (He was lying like a hatter, I could see).
 “I was with him when the Frenchies’ line we broke,
 With our wooden ships and sailors’ hearts of oak,
 And the great three-decker’s cannon’s voice awoke,
 Every minute as they thundered thro’ the smoke.”

“Oh, blow it !” said the sailor man to me
 (His language, I admit, was rather free),
 “Now you sends a black torpedo, and it seeks
 To hit a wessel sideways—then she leaks,
 And sinks while every sailor prays and shrieks,
 Wot fightin’—why, it’s murder ! yah ! the sneaks.”

ON leaving Cocom, Jack at once went to Don Miguel and informed him of the Indian rising. Maraquando thought but little of the affair, as it was unlikely

unarmed savages would dare to attack a force of one thousand soldiers. Besides, the journey to Janjalla was through a civilised and cultivated country, and an Indian raid was improbable. Nevertheless, at Jack's urgent request, he spoke to President Gomez about the matter, and though his Excellency took the same view as did Maraquando, yet he sent on messengers to overtake the reinforcements and inform them of their possible danger.

The next day at three o'clock the vessels were to leave for Janjalla, but when the hour came it was found that the torpederas were far from ready. It is true *The Iturbide* was in a state of efficiency, and could have left Tlatonac at the appointed time, but the complicated engines of *The Montezuma* and *The Zuloaga* were somewhat out of gear. Though the engineers worked day and night to get everything in order, yet it was not until three days had elapsed that the squadron was ready to start. This delay made Rafael feel very uneasy lest the consorts of *The Pizarro* should return south before they could sink her by the torpedoes. He reckoned out the matter with Jack.

"Dios, mi amigo! Three days have gone since *The Cortes* and *The Columbus* passed Tlatonac with the transports to the north. It is three hundred miles to Acauhtzin, and those boats steam at the rate of twelve knots an hour——"

"True," interrupted Jack, significantly; "but the transports do not."

"That is so, Juan. Let us reckon accordingly. Steaming at the rate of twelve knots, the war-ships would probably reach Acauhtzin in twenty-five hours. Allowing for the slowness of the transports say thirty hours. In twenty-four hours they will be able to take in troops, provisions, horses and guns. That makes fifty-four hours. Steaming south to Tlatonac thirty hours. Eighty-four hours. To Janjalla from here it is a hundred miles—say twelve hours. In all ninety-six hours. Divide by twenty-four, that is exactly four days."

"At that rate, the rebel ships cannot possibly reach Janjalla before to-morrow midnight. When do we leave here?"

"About three o'clock," said Rafael, glancing at his watch. "The torpederas can knock out eighteen

knots, but the full speed of *The Iturbide* is fifteen. We will reckon at that, so by leaving here at three can reach Janjalla long before midnight."

"Bueno! We shall have a clear twenty-four hours in which to sink *The Pizarro*."

"Twelve," contradicted Rafael, captiously, "we must attack in the darkness. The less risk the better."

"I don't see that it makes much difference," retorted Jack, grimly, "if *The Pizarro* can fight two torpedo boats and an armed cruiser she is a mighty clever ship. I look upon *The Pizarro* as lost."

"So do I, Juan," replied Rafael, with a sad expression flitting across his face, "she was my ship, you know. I am sorry that it falls to my lot to sink her."

"Perhaps she will surrender."

"Not while she is commanded by De Galvez. He was my first lieutenant, and is as obstinate as the devil. Dios! There is noon. We have not much time in which to make our adieux. Go up and see Dolores, mi amigo, but return by two o'clock."

Jack gladly took advantage of the permission and

had a long interview with Dolores, who wept bitterly at the idea of parting with him again. She was already low-spirited, through having comforted Eulalia, and now that her own lover was going away broke down entirely.

"Promise me you will take the greatest care of yourself, querido."

"My dearest, I will ask Rafael to wrap me in cotton wool. But, indeed, cara, you need not fear. I will be as safe on board *The Montezuma* as in Tlatonac."

"But you will be gone many days."

"A week at the most. If we succeed in sinking *The Pizarro* we will steam north to meet the other war-ships, and try our luck with them."

"I will pray for you, Juanito, and I will look after the beetles of Don Pedro."

Jack burst out laughing at the incongruity of such coupling.

"Has Don Pedro asked you to look after that rubbish!"

"Yes, Juanito! I am to take the very greatest care. They are precious."

"In the doctor's eyes they are more precious than the opal. By the way, where is Peter?"

"He has said farewell, and departed with my uncle. Would I could come down to the boat, querido. But I dare not."

"I never knew such particular people as the Tlatonacians," muttered Jack, somewhat vexed. "Well, angelito, we must say good-bye here."

"Will you take the opal for good fortune, Juan?"

"I? Take the opal? My dear Dolores, I would be frightened out of my life at carrying such a treasure with me. No! No! You keep the opal with yourself, and yourself in Tlatonac. Then will the good fortune of the city be assured. But I will take this ring."

"Turquoise! rubies! pearls!" said Dolores, drawing it off her finger. "It was my mother's, querido. Now it is yours."

"A thousand thousand thanks, alma de mi alma!" replied Jack, slipping it on his little finger, "it will remind me ever of you. Rubies for your lips, pearls for your teeth, and—and——"

"Ah! and what for turquoise?" said Dolores, seeing he was rather nonplussed, "for my eyes?"

"No, those are black! Well, we will say turquoise for peace. The blue ray of the opal means peace. And now, good-bye, my dearest—my own one!"

"Adios, Juanito. My soul! My heart!"

Jack, not trusting himself to speak further, kissed her passionately, and hastily left the house. Fortunately, he met no one, much to his gratification, as he was too agitated to say a word. He went to his house, and put all his necessities together, then, in company with Peter, went on board *The Montezuma*.

At three o'clock the forts saluted the squadron, and *The Iturbide*, followed by the torpederas, stood out to sea. The crowd on the beach watched the vessels until they were mere specks on the horizon, and then retreated within the walls, with loudly expressed hopes that they would return with the rebel ship in tow. The Tlatonacians expected much more than they were ever likely to obtain.

The three vessels stood out about ten miles from the coast, and steamed southward at no great speed, as Pederaza did not wish to fetch Janjalla until dark-

ness had set in. As two warships and the transports had gone to Acauhtzin, it was probable that *The Pizarro* would be the only vessel left in the harbour, and vigilant watch would be kept on board, lest the torpederas should come on her unawares. The rebel commander knew perfectly well that the torpederas had arrived, and would soon be in chase of his ships; but he did not expect that they would be able to attack while the other war-ships were away. Still, it was probable *The Pizarro* would make good use of her search-lights, and Pederaza, wishing to come to close quarters unexpectedly, had to exercise the greatest care as they drew near the harbour.

Towards nine o'clock they were off the coast of Janjalla, and intense excitement prevailed on board all three vessels. The plan of attack had been settled at a general counsel on board *The Iturbide* before they left Tlatonac, and it was arranged as follows. *The Iturbide* was to steam silently into the harbour of Janjalla, followed by the torpederas, and come to close quarters with *The Pizarro*, if possible. Should she be discovered by the search-light of the latter, she was then to steam boldly ahead, and concen-

trate the attention of the rebels on herself. *The Pizarro*, thus being busy with the cruiser, would not notice the torpederas, which could then steal silently within five hundred yards, and launch a Whitehead or so. The result would be obvious.

The torpederas, with twin screws and powerful engines, manœuvred with wonderful rapidity, darting here and there in the darkness like black sharks. Both were armed with Hotchkiss guns and four Whitehead torpedo-tubes, while their strong search-lights protected them against the unexpected approach of an enemy. Painted a dark colour to escape notice, they could steal silently within striking distance of a vessel, and sink her with one of their deadly explosives. The only chance of safety for *The Pizarro* lay in her sighting them at a considerable distance, and keeping them at bay with her heavy guns; but as she would be fully taken up with *The Iturbide*, this would be difficult for her to do. Worst of all, she had no defence against the rapid darting torpederas, as the nets had been left behind in Tlatonac, when she deserted to the rebel Xuarez.

As to the cruiser, she was a handsome vessel, with a spar deck, and filled with bow chasers and Gatling guns. She carried a crew of ninety men including officers, and also two hundred soldiers, who had embarked at Tlatonac to be landed, if possible, at Janjalla. Fifteen knots was her usual speed ; but, if necessary, she could stand to seventeen. This was the fleet of the Junta, and now manœuvred ten miles from the town of Janjalla, waiting the signal to pounce down on the unsuspecting *Pizarro*.

Fortunately the night was cloudy and dark. At intervals the moon, emerging from behind heavy clouds, cast a pale light over the scene. It was far down in the west, and would soon drop behind the low-lying shore, so Pedraza, who wanted complete darkness for his project, waited until her disappearance before he gave the signal to steam into the harbour. All lights were extinguished on the vessel, so as to avoid attracting the attention of the enemy, but, if necessary, the search-lights could blaze forth in an instant. The torpederas were to attack the warship, one on the port, the other on the starboard side. It was now close upon midnight, and as the moon showed

but half her orb above the shore, all waited the signal in breathless silence.

"What is to be done if we sink *The Pizarro*?" asked Jack, as he stood by Rafael, watching for the signal from *The Iturbide*.

"Quien sabe!" replied Maraquando, shrugging his shoulders, "I expect we will wait in the harbour till daylight, and then see if we can land our troops."

"There won't be much chance of that, my Comandante," said Duval, drily; "between us and Janjalla two thousand rebel troops lie encamped. We cannot break through that barrier."

"You forget, mi amigo, there are close on a thousand troops of the Junta in the town. By this time the reinforcements must have reached their destination, so that will make two thousand. If they attack the rebels from Janjalla, and we land our two hundred men under cover of *The Iturbide's* guns, who knows but what we may not be able to crush these scoundrels before their warships and transports arrive from Acauhtzin."

"Bueno! Always presuming that the reinforcements have arrived safely. I fear the Indians."

"Carambo! Surely a thousand well-armed soldiers are a match for a horde of naked savages. The reinforcements are safe in Janjalla by now. I am sure of it. Believe me, Don Juan, we shall exterminate the rebels."

"First we shall have to exterminate *The Pizarro*, and——"

"Hold!" interrupted Rafael joyfully, "the signal."

A rocket shot up from *The Iturbide* and scattered its fires in the dark air. The moon had entirely disappeared, and an intense gloom prevailed over land and sea.

Hardly had the rocket's trail of fire disappeared when *The Iturbide's* screw began to spin and followed by the torpederas she moved cautiously towards the harbour at half speed. At the end of an hour all three vessels were within sight of the town. Through the gloom sparkled the lights of Janjalla, and between them and the incoming vessels lay the huge bulk of *The Pizarro*, the glare of her search-lights shooting up into the dark like two gigantic swords of pale flame.

The Iturbide was leading by three hundred yards,

and crept cautiously forward so as to pounce on her prey unawares. Whether the noise of her screw reached the ears of those on board *The Pizarro*, or that they marked her coming through the darkness, it is impossible to say, but just as she steamed within eight hundred yards, the search-lights swept round like the spokes of a wheel and in a moment there glare revealed her whereabouts. In the radiance she stood out like a phantom ship, and seeing that he was discovered, Pedraza cracking on all steam, swept past *The Pizarro* in a wide circle.

A heavy fire was at once opened by the rebels and they doubtless deemed that this foe was not alone, for keeping one light on the cruiser, they swept the sea with the other in search of her possible companions. Those on board *The Iturbide* could hear the yell of mingled rage and terror, as the light struck the low bulk of *The Zuloaga* darting through the water, evil looking and venomous. A broadside was poured on the torpedera, now left unprotected by *The Iturbide* which was circling to the left in the inner part of the bay. Owing to the dexterity of *The Zuloaga's* manœuvring, none of the heavy guns could hit her.

She skimmed the grey waves at full speed like a swallow, and the search light of *The Pizarro* was much put to in following her. It was like a dancer in the theatre followed by the lime light. One moment the torpedera would be swallowed up in the gloom, the next moment the darting ray of the electric light would stab through the darkness and pick her out. The other ray followed *The Iturbide*, which kept steaming slowly backwards and forwards on the port side, firing her Armstrongs whenever she got a fair chance.

The Zuloaga sent off a bow torpedo, but it passed harmlessly under the stern of *The Pizarro* without doing any damage. Nevertheless, the crew of the rebel ship seemed much alarmed, as well they might be, seeing that a single torpedo striking them amidships would sink their iron ship in a few minutes. Foolishly enough, it never occurred to De Galevez to sweep the starboard with his lights, and he was quite unaware that a second torpedo-vessel was stealing up in the darkness.

Indeed, what with following *The Iturbide* and *The Zuloaga* with his search-lights, De Galevez had

enough to do, and kept the torpedo boat at bay with his heavy guns. Occasionally a shot from *The Iturbide* would pass through the rigging of the rebel ship, but no damage was done, and De Galevez's great desire was to keep at a distance the wasp-like torpedo which circled round rapidly, everywhere trying to plant its sting.

While this drama was taking place on the port side, *The Montezuma*, on seeing *The Iturbide* was discovered, moved up on the starboard at a distance of four hundred yards. When abreast of *The Pizarro* she slowed down her engines and crept up within pistol range. Had it not been for the incessant firing of the guns, those on board *The Pizarro* would surely have become aware of their danger. As it was, they thought themselves safe while they kept *The Zuloaga* at a distance. A tremendous broadside was directed at that torpedera and at *The Iturbide*. It was her last discharge, for the next moment she was struck amidships by a torpedo from *The Montezuma*.

There was a cry of frenzied fear, and the search lights flashed round to starboard only to see *The*

Montezuma slipping back into the gloom. Three minutes afterwards *The Pizarro* sank.

The vessels of the Junta at once flashed their electric rays on the spot, and where a moment before had been a magnificent vessel, now saw nothing but a wide expanse of cold black sea dotted with drowning men. Boats were lowered by *The Iturbide* and a few soldiers and sailors were rescued, but so suddenly had *The Pizarro* gone down that, with the exception of half a dozen survivors, the whole crew, officers, and soldiers, in all three hundred men, were drowned.

It would be impossible to describe the joy on board the loyalist ships at this successful termination of the contest. Rafael and Jack went on board *The Iturbide* to receive the congratulations of Pedraza for their success, and the officers of *The Zuloaga* also hastened to participate in the general joy. The large state-room of the cruiser was one mass of excited men, drinking champagne, and wildly embracing one another. This victory would surely damp the enthusiasm of the rebels, and raise that of the loyalists to fever pitch. Don Hypolito had now but two ships of war, and these could not surely

stand before the valour of *The Iturbide*, with her two torpedo-vessels. The *vivas* were deafening, and Rafael, as commander of the boat which had sunk *The Pizarro*, was nearly stifled by the embraces of his brother officers.

As soon as the excitement had somewhat subsided, all went on deck, and *The Iturbide* stood in to the shore with the idea of seeing how matters stood in the rebel camp. Flying the Opal flag, lest the forts should open fire on one of their own vessels, the cruiser turned her lights on to the beach, and saw that it was lined with the rebel forces, all under arms. The noise of the firing and the flashing of the lights had attracted the attention of those on shore, and fearing that an attack was contemplated by the enemy, those rebels encamped in front of Janjalla were now on the alert. No one could understand the reason of this sea-fight, as it seemed quite impossible that the torpederas could have arrived from Tlatonac in so short a period. The general in command of the troops of Xuarez did not know what to think, and had to wait, till dawn before he could make up his mind what course to pursue.

As the lights of *The Iturbide* struck the distant town, a long line of walls, surmounted by a crowd, leaped out of the darkness. The search-lights from the forts were flashed on to the ships, and those in Janjalla recognising the Opal flag, cheered vociferously. They saw three boats, each flying the ensign of Tlatonac, and no *Pizarro*. Then they guessed what had occurred, and were glad accordingly. The rebel soldiers on the beach stamped and swore with rage as they saw their loss, but being without boats could do nothing save parade under arms till dawn, so as to be prepared against a possible attack by the victorious loyalists.

“Bueno!” cried Captain Pedraza, who had his night glass up. “There is one good thing, mis amigos, the Opal flag still flies over the town, so as yet it holds out.”

“What is next to be done, Comandante?” asked Jack, who was standing near with Rafael.

“We must wait till dawn, Señor Americano, and then find out if the reinforcements have arrived at Janjalla. Afterwards we will steam back to Tlatonac, and if possible meet the *Cortes* and *Columbus* coming

back. In any event, we must go to Tlatonac to report this victory to the Junta."

"Shall you land these two hundred troops?"

"Caranto! Why not?"

"Because the camp of the enemy lies between the town and ourselves. Two hundred men cannot do much against two thousand."

"True, Señor. If it is impossible, we will not attempt it. But at dawn, I will signal to General Gigedo to make a sally from the gates down to the shore; our men will land, and effect a conjunction, and so with small loss they ought to get into the town. Especially under cover of our guns, and those of the forts."

"I don't see what use that will be, Pedraza," interrupted Rafael, bluntly.

"Caro, Señor! His Excellency ordered this to be done, so it must be done."

"Rather a useless task, I think," said Jack, dryly. "However, I am not sorry, as I wish to get into the town myself. But you, Señor Comandante, what will you do?"

"Wait till these troops are safe with Gigedo, and

also ascertain if the reinforcements have arrived. Then I shall sail north."

"You won't wait for the warships and transports?"

"Carajo! what use? We shall find those on our way to Tlatonac."

After this conversation, Rafael and Jack returned on board *The Montezuma*, the former slightly gloomy in spite of the victory so unexpectedly achieved.

"Caro, Juan!" he said, reflectively; "if we lose this war, it will be through Don Francisco Gomez. He is a good politician, but a bad general. What use is there to sacrifice two hundred men to-morrow?"

"It's rather like the Charge of the Light Brigade, certainly," replied Jack, with a smile; "as foolhardy and as brave."

"What is that, mi amigo?"

Whereupon Jack related the glorious charge to Rafael, and thereby stirred up the excitable Spaniard to fiery enthusiasm.

"Oh, what men are the English," he cried, stamping his foot. "It is a story worthy of the Cid. But this to-morrow, my friend—it is rare! it is brave! and, like your story, there is no good to be gained."

"Perhaps Gomez wants to frighten the rebels by showing them how dauntless are his men."

"Dios! That is not wise. The sinking of *The Pizarro* will frighten them without risking two hundred lives. However, as it is ordered, it must be done. But you, Don Juan! Will you go?"

"Assuredly, mi amigo. I wish to see the Señor Correspondent and Felipe."

"But you will be killed."

"That is as it may be. But no, Rafael. I did not escape the perils of Totatzine to fall in a skirmish before the walls of Janjalla. But see, mi amigo, it is nearly dawn, let us snatch a few hours' sleep."

"Bueno!" replied Rafael, leading the way to his cabin; "but first we must call our friends together, and toast our victory once more."

It was done accordingly.

CHAPTER XIII.

WITHOUT THE WALLS.

Walls of stone like mountains rise,
 Grey against the morning skies ;
 Still the royal banner flies,
 Watched with hate by rebels' eyes.
 And around the ramparts grey,
 In the mists an army lies.

Set in battle's wild array,
 At the dawning of the day,
 Traitors to their sovereign they,
 Who would loyal subjects slay.
 Hold this city as a slave,
 Under democratic sway.

Cannons thunder, banners wave,
 As come on the foemen brave,
 'Neath these walls to find a grave ;
 Yet this city shall we save,
 Never let it be the prize
 Of the coward, fool, and knave.

SHORTLY after dawn, Jack went on deck, to have a thorough examination of the coast-line. The situation of Janjalla was peculiar. To the right a shallow river meandered seaward through low-lying, swampy

ground, discharging itself sluggishly by several mouths. A desolate plain stretched for leagues on the left to the base of distant mountains, and between swamp and plain the city appeared built on a rocky height. Directly in front of the walls the sandy ground fell rapidly towards the sea, on the extreme verge of which was a compact mass of huts forming a kind of sea-port. The wharf shot out suddenly from this miniature town. It lay along the hollow of the beach, and above it, in the near distance, rose the grey walls of Janjalla from the rocky cliffs. Above these, the domes of churches, the towers of houses, and, highest of all, the expanse of bluish sky grey with the chill mists of morning.

In the beach hollow, the army of Xuarez was encamped, partly in the houses, partly in the tents which whitely dotted the desolate shore. Owing to the rapid fall of the ground from the ramparts, the invaders were quite safe from the cannon of the forts. These could defend the town against the attack of ships, but were unable to be depressed sufficiently to command the spot where the rebels were encamped, thus, in the very jaws of danger,

lay the besiegers in comparative safety. Jack, surveying all this through a telescope, was astonished to see that the engineers who had constructed the defences had been so foolish as to leave this debatable ground between rampart and sea. Perhaps they deemed that the cannon would not permit ships to approach near enough for the disembarking of hostile troops, but they seemed to have forgotten that the heavy guns of a man-of-war could silence the forts. This, perhaps, had not been done, as the cannon on the ramparts still defended the city; but there was no doubt in Jack's mind that Don Hypolito had landed his troops under cover of a heavy fire from his three ships directed at the forts. Once encamped on shore, and the besiegers could bid defiance to the lines of cannon, whose balls passed harmlessly over their heads.

"Ola, Señor Juan," said Rafael's gay voice behind him, "you are up early."

"Good morning, mi amigo," replied Jack, turning with a smile. "I have been up at least half an hour, examining the town."

"A place forsaken of God, is it not? Dios! to

think that some fools would have this to be the capital of Cholocaca. Swamps there, sandy plains yonder. Holy Mary! how can it compare with Tlatonac?"

"It is the first time I have been so far south, and I don't think much of either country or town."

"Oh, the situation is good for defence."

"I'm not so sure of that, Rafael. It is true that the city is built on a rocky height, and well defended by swamp and desert; but look how safely enemies can lie under the walls."

"Eh! what would you, Juan? The muzzles of the guns cannot be depressed sufficiently to sweep the beach."

"Then why didn't the engineers build two forts right and left, in order to command the intervening ground?"

"Dios! And thus knock each other to pieces."

"True. Well, then, have one fort. See, mi amigo. On the right, that wide swamp is a sufficient protection against the approach of an enemy; but had I constructed the defences of the town, I would have run an arm of forts between the desert

and that sea-fort. Thus a double line of cannon would have commanded the beach, and even if an enemy did succeed in landing in face of the fire of the town forts, they could not have encamped there as they have done."

"That is true, Juan," replied Rafael, who now had the telescope to his eye. "But it is now too late to deplore the lack of defences. The rebels have landed, and are safely bestowed within stone-throw of the city. Look at the number of them, and all on the alert. Santissima! they won't feel very happy this morning, now that they see *The Pizarro* is lost."

"Surely," said Jack, taking no notice of this last remark, "surely Pedraza does not intend to land two hundred men directly in front of the town?"

"It is foolish, I admit," answered Rafael, shrugging his shoulders; "but what with a sally of our troops from the town, and the guns of our boats playing on the beach, it may be managed."

"I doubt it. Two hundred men may land under cover of our fire; but, believe me, Rafael, fifty will not break through that living barrier and enter the town."

"I grant that. As I said last night, it is a useless waste of life, and his Excellency must have surely forgotten the situation of Janjalla when he gave such a rash command. But what else can be done, save obey his order?"

"Obey it, by all means, but not in the way commanded."

"What do you mean?"

Jack was sweeping the shore right and left with the telescope, and did not reply for a few minutes. At length he spoke, indicating the several points he mentioned, with his hand.

"Behold, mi amigo," he said, pointing towards the desert, "to land there would be foolish, as the enemy could march along to defend that point while the boats pulled in. The same with the central position. It is madness to land in the teeth of two thousand men. But look to the right. Why not land the troops up the coast, and let the swamp lie between them and the enemy?"

"Bueno!" replied Rafael, seizing the idea at once. "But how do you propose to enter the city?"

"Ah, that I can't say, not knowing the geography of the place."

"I have a map below. Come with me, Juan, and we will invent some plan, then go on board *The Iturbide* to interview Pedraza. I am with you in trying to prevent this sacrifice of two hundred men by landing them in the jaws of danger."

They went down to the cabin, and Rafael, after hunting about for a few minutes, found a map of the southern portion of Cholocaca. He spread it out on the table, and they began to examine it at once.

"Here!" said Jack, drawing his finger along the paper; "here is Janjalla, here the swamp and river, beyond is a kind of rolling prairie. If we land the troops here, we can march them parallel to the river, into the interior country."

"That is so, mi amigo! But, you see, the river is ever between the troops and the city. If the enemy see our men marching on this side, they can march on the other, and so keep our men from entering the city."

"Not if Pedraza signals to the forts. You forget that the rebels are only safe so long as they keep in

the hollow of the beach. If they march up on the right, they expose themselves to a heavy fire. Consequently, the forts can keep them in check, and our troops, marching along on the right bank of the stream, can surely find some ford by which to cross, and then gain the inland gate of Janjalla by a detour."

"Como, no!" exclaimed Rafael, in a lively tone rolling up the map. "It is not at all a bad idea. Let us board *The Iturbide*, and explain your plan to the Comandante."

"Who commands the expedition?" asked Jack, as he hastily snatched up a brace of revolvers and a heavy cloak.

"Don Sebastian de Ahumada. He is a great friend of mine. In fact," added Rafael, laughing, "he is a cousin of Doña Carmencita de Tajada."

"My poor Rafael, your suit does not progress much in that quarter."

"Not with Don José, perhaps; but I am content to wait till the war is ended, so far as my angel is concerned. She will be true to me, as I to her. By the way, mi amigo, know you that Don José is now

Governor of Acauhtzin, in the absence of Don Hypolito?"

"No, I did not know it. Is Don Hypolito yonder?"

"Not now. He was on board *The Cortes*, and has gone back to Acauhtzin, but will doubtless come south again, to personally conduct the war."

"I should like to get a shot at him," said Jack, grimly; "the brute. I shall never forgive him for his treachery. Well, who knows?"

Perhaps a recruit
May chance to shoot
Great General Bonaparte."

"What say you?" asked Rafael, puzzled at those lines, which were recited in English.

"Nothing, nothing. A something to relieve my feelings. Is that boat never going to be ready?"

"It is ready now," said the young man, gaily; "in with you, mi amigo! Row to *The Iturbide* Benito! So—give way, men!"

The oars dipped into the water as the sun arose in the east, and the boat shot away from *The Montezuma* over a flood of gold. Rafael was in great spirits, and chatted gaily all the time; but Jack,

thinking of the peril of the proposed expedition, was graver. Besides, he was anxious about the safety of Philip and Tim.

"By the way," said Rafael, suddenly, "Don Pedro did not return with us last night."

"No; Pedraza asked him to sleep on board *The Iturbide*. See, there he is, looking over the bulwarks. I can tell him by the flash of the sun on his spectacles!"

"Dios! How strange! Will Don Pedro go with you into the town?"

"Certainly not," replied Jack, decisively; "it is too risky! Take him back with you to Tlatonac."

"Assuredly! My aunt would never forgive me if harm came to Don Pedro."

Rafael laughed heartily at the idea, for this undutiful nephew was much amused at the flirtation between Peter and Serafina.

"She will marry him, Juan! I am sure of it."

"Then we will have four weddings when the war is over, Rafael."

"Four weddings. Por todos santos! What mean you?"

"Myself and Dolores. Yourself and Doña Carmencita. Pedro and your aunt, and Señor Felipe and Doña Eulalia!"

"Eh, mi amigo!" cried Rafael, in a lively tone, "does my sister favour that cavalier? Dios! what says my father?"

"He does not know anything yet. But as he has consented to receive one heretic into his family, he can surely stretch a point, and receive two."

"Como, no! But it may be! Who knows? Ah! Here we are at *The Iturbide*. Come, Juan!"

They climbed up the side of the cruiser, and were received by Captain Pedraza and Peter.

"Buenos días de Dios á ustedes, Señores," said Pedraza, greeting them heartily. "I am glad to see you both, as I wish to land these troops at once. Señor Pedro desires to go also."

"What nonsense, Peter," said Jack, in English, turning to his friend; "it is too dangerous. You stay on board, and go back to Tlatonac."

"I shall not!" returned the doctor, indignantly; "you are going, so why should not I? Besides, I wish

to see Tim, and to be certain that Philip has arrived safely."

"I don't want you killed, Peter," protested Jack.

"I won't be killed any more than you will be, Jack. It's not a bit of use your talking, I'm going with you. I have my medicine-chest with me."

"Oh, well, obstinacy! Have it your own way," replied Duval, touched by this proof of Peter's friendship; "but Tim will pitch at me for bringing you into danger."

"Tim will be glad enough to have a doctor at hand. Why, Jack, I should have been at Totazine to cure you."

"Cocom was good at a pinch."

"A quack!" muttered Peter, scornfully. He could not forgive Cocom having cured Jack so rapidly. It was a case of professional jealousy.

"Señor Duval," said Pedraza, approaching Jack, "Don Rafael tells me you and he have hit on a plan to land the troops without danger."

Jack signified that they had some such idea in their heads, and in company with Pedraza, they went below to look at the map. Don Sebastian followed

them, and after a long discussion, the Comandante decided to accept the suggestion. *The Iturbide* raised her anchor, and steamed a short distance up the coast, so as to land the troops beyond the swamp. Signals having been made to the torpederas, they remained in their former position, before the town.

When the rebels saw *The Iturbide* moving northward, they shouted with joy, thinking that she was about to leave the harbour; but their delight was turned into rage as they saw boat after boat drop from her sides, and, laden with troops, make for the shore. Numbers ran along the beach, to the verge of the swamp, but here their progress was stayed, as it was impossible for them to cross the quagmire. They could only remain quiet, and gesticulate with anger, though many fired their guns, and two cannon were brought along the shore in the hope of doing some damage.

As yet they were safe, from the forts being too much in the hollow; but when Pedraza saw the cannon brought up, he opened fire with his Armstrongs, and signalled to the torpederas. These steamed abreast of

the swamp at once, and did considerable damage with their rapid-firing Hotchkiss guns. Under cover of this cannonade, the whole of the troops were duly landed, in admirable order, with the utmost celerity, and then Jack, Peter, and Don Sebastian prepared to go on shore. Pedraza gave De Ahumada sealed orders for Gigedo from the President, and Rafael occupied himself in saying farewell to his English friends.

"You have your revolvers, mis amigos?" he said anxiously; "and swords? Good! Cloaks? Ah, that is well. Have, also, these flasks of aguardiente; you will need sustenance. The march to the inland-gate may be a long one. Adios."

"Adios," replied Jack, dropping over the side. "Give my love to Dolores, when you return to Tlatonac."

"I shall not fail. And, Don Pedro, have you any message?"

"Si, Señor," replied Peter, in his hesitating Spanish. "Doña Dolores. Escarabajos."

"Beetles!" echoed Rafael, in great astonishment. "What does he mean by beetles?"

His curiosity was not gratified, for already the boat

was making rapidly for the shore, and Jack, standing up in the stern, was waving his adieux to all on board.

By this time the sun was far above the horizon, and already the heat was becoming unpleasantly great. Don Sebastian at once formed his men into marching order, and the little company proceeded along the bank of the river, towards the interior of the country. Before them spread a kind of rolling downs, with undulating hills, sparsely covered with vegetation. Here and there patches of yellow sand streaked with fine white dust. On one side stretched the illimitable plains, and on the other the ground marshy and treacherous, sank imperceptibly into the bed of the slow-flowing river. Beyond this, an interval of firm land for some considerable distance, and then the rocky shelf on which Janjalla was built. In front the stream meandered in an erratic manner inland ; away in the extreme distance appeared the dim line of forest, above which arose the snowy cone of Xicotencatl. Over all arched the cloudless blue sky, with the sun flaming hotly in the east.

The rebels had been considerably cut up by the in-

cessant firing of the ships, and had wisely fallen back into their camp. When, however, they saw the loyalists moving inland, along the bank of the stream, a troop of cavalry, some hundreds strong, galloped towards the swamp to intercept them, if possible. The cruiser and the torpederas were still in their former position, and as the cavalry turned the fatal corner, to make for the inner country, they opened a heavy cannonade. Considerable damage was inflicted particularly by the Hotchkiss guns, and numbers of riders were soon struggling on the ground with their wounded horses. In a few minutes, however, the troop, nothing dismayed, escaped beyond the line of fire, and galloped parallel with the loyalists, between swamp and walls.

This defile proved to be a perfect death-trap. For those within the town, having observed the landing of the reinforcements, and the chase by the enemy, opened fire from the forts, and shattered the compact mass of horses and men as they steadily galloped along. At length, however, they had to cease their fire, as the rebels artfully kept abreast of the loyalists, and at times the balls swept across the swamp, and

played havoc with the soldiers of Don Sebastian. The only thing to be done, therefore, was to let the cavalry go free, and trust to a hand-to-hand combat when on the sandy plains at the back of the town.

Both the ships and the forts, however, were determined that no more of the enemy should join in the pursuit, for a heavy cannonade was kept up as another troop tried to follow, and effectually held them back.

"Bueno!" said Don Sebastian, when he saw this. "We have but to deal with those abreast of us; no more can follow."

"Cavalry against infantry, mi amigo! It is unequal, particularly if we try to cross the river."

"Perhaps those in the town will come to our assistance," suggested Peter, who was trudging along manfully.

"It is probable," replied De Ahumada, when this remark was translated into good Spanish by Jack. "See, we are now nearly at the end of the town. Yonder is the land-gate. If we remain here, assistance may come, and while the cavalry are defending themselves against our friends, we may be able to cross the river."

"Yes ; that is if the cavalry don't get reinforced by their own men coming round the other side of the town."

"Dios !" exclaimed Don Sebastian, grimly, "reinforcements certainly can come that way, but they will be forced to make a wide detour in order to keep out of range of the fort-guns. By the time they come up we may be inside the walls."

"I fervently trust so, Señor," replied Duval, who, though no coward, did not relish the idea of engaging two hundred infantry with double the number of cavalry.

The city was enclosed by walls of a considerable height, was shaped in a triangular fashion, the base being towards the ocean, and the land-gate at the acute angle inland. They had now walked some distance past the gate on the other side of the river, and a wide sheet of water rolled between them and their enemies. On all sides spread the sandy plain, and the walls of the city rose suddenly from the flat surface in a most unexpected fashion. On the left bank halted the cavalry of the enemy, prepared to dispute their crossing, and Don Sebastian was

sorely puzzled as to what was the best course to pursue.

"It is madness to cross in the face of that, Don Juan."

"Well, if we don't cross at once they will be reinforced from the other side, and then it will be worse."

"Look, Jack, look!" cried Peter at this moment, "the gates are open!"

Just as he spoke a body of cavalry debouched from the city, and came rapidly towards the rebels. They at once turned to meet this new danger, and thus their attention was drawn off the infantry, upon seeing which Don Sebastian waited a few minutes until the opposing forces clashed together, and then gave the order to cross the river.

"Must we strip?" asked Peter, ruefully, looking at the three hundred yards of water before him.

"Strip! no, man!" said Jack, laughing, "unless you want to enter Janjalla naked. You can swim. At least you could at Bedford."

"Of course I can swim," said Peter, testily; "but I hate getting my clothes wet."

“Oh, hang your clothes ! The river is slow-flowing, so it is easy to get across. See ! the advance files are in already. In with you !”

Peter did not need any second admonition, but waded into the water beside Jack and Don Sebastian. The cavalry, which otherwise would have shot them down as they swam across, were fully occupied with the loyalist regiment from Janjalla. Already in the extreme distance dark masses might be seen rapidly moving along. They were the reinforcements for the rebels making a detour on the other side of the city. There was not a moment to be lost.

In a remarkably short space of time the whole of the infantry had crossed, and were now standing high and dry on the other bank. Not even giving them time to shake the water from their clothes, Don Sebastian made them kneel and open fire on the rebels in the rear. Fortunately each man had piled his musket and ammunition on his head while swimming, so their arms were in excellent condition, and their cartridges unwetted. A fusillade burst from the line, and wrought considerable damage in the ranks of the enemy. Taken thus between two fires, the rebels

found themselves in exceedingly hot water, but trusting that their comrades would soon reach them, turned and tried to ride down the infantry. The soldiers immediately sprung to their feet and scattered widely, firing into the troop whenever they got a chance.

Fresh troops of loyalist cavalry poured out of the gates and made for the scene of action. What with being pretty nearly equally matched with the cavalry, and exposed to the galling fire of the infantry, the rebels began to lose heart, and, breaking into disorderly masses, spread over the plain. The gates of the city were distant a quarter of a mile, and seeing that the reinforcements of the enemy were close at hand, Don Sebastian shouted to his men to close up and make for the shelter of the walls. Seeing this the rebel reinforcements, darting between the moving loyalists and the gates, tried to cut them off, but were met in their turn by the mounted troops from Janjalla. The plain was strewn with dead and dying, and the incessant cracking of rifles, the yells of the combatants, and the thick clouds of pungent smoke added to the horrors of the skirmish.

A huge trooper rode straight at Peter, and rolled him in the dust, but Jack being close at hand shot the horse with his revolver, and pulled his friend out of harm's way. By this time they were near the gates, and Peter being somewhat stunned by his knock-down, was dragged along rapidly by Jack, who wanted to get him into shelter as speedily as possible.

It was now dangerous for the infantry to fire, as friend and foe were blended in an inextricable mass ; so, forming line as speedily as possible, they ran for the gate, and at length reached it in safety. Seeing that they were now out of danger, the cavalry of Janjalla began to retreat towards the portal. To the left of the town, great masses of reinforcements were moving up, and it would have been madness to have opposed them with the small force of loyalists outside. The cavalry galloped back, and as by this time the infantry had fled inside the walls, the gates were closed at once.

"Jack ! Jack ! Peter !" cried a well-known voice, as Tim, grimy with gunpowder and smoke, plunged down the street towards the gate. "Are you safe ?"

"Quite safe. But why the deuce are these men

coming back? Why don't they pour out and exterminate those devils?"

"What!" yelled Tim, throwing up his arms in surprise. "Why they can't be spared. There's but seven hundred men here!"

"Seven hundred!" cried Jack, seized with a sudden qualm of fear. "But the reinforcements—the thousand men?"

"No reinforcements have arrived, Jack."

"And Philip?"

"Philip!" said Tim, in alarm. "Was he with the reinforcements? God be gracious to me. Not a man has arrived. When did they leave Tlatonac?"

"Four days ago."

"Four days! One hundred miles!"

The three friends, amid the tumult around them, with the enemy thundering at the gate, looked at one another in silent dread. Then Jack took off his sombrero.

"Poor Philip!" he said, solemnly. "I was afraid of those Indians. Oh, my poor friend!"

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